

“The Great War Correspondent: Francis McCullagh, 1874-1956”, *Irish Historical Studies*, XXXVI (44), Nov. 2009), 542-563.

John Horgan



Trotsky of Russia knows Francis McCullagh. So does President Calles of Mexico. Peter, the King of Serbia, was McCullagh's friend. The head hunters of the upper Amazon list Francis McCullagh as one of their principal deities. The warring tribes of Morocco call him blood brother. A room is always ready for him in the imperial palace of Siam. The latchstrings of hundreds of Siberian peasant huts are out in anticipation of his coming.<sup>1</sup>

Even allowing for the customarily hyperbolic style of Irish provincial journalism, the above description tends to take the breath away and to induce – in the historian at least – a certain professional caution. And yet, behind the overblown rhetoric, there lies an extraordinary career which offers a fascinating case history of the style and development of early twentieth century international journalism, and also of the interface between journalism, politics and the cultural and religious issues that featured so dramatically in that era on several continents. It provides at least some evidence of the ways in which journalists, in any era, can allow their own hopes and fears to colour their predictions about political developments. But it also marks out McCullagh as one of an elite group of Irish journalists who, in the generation after Tallaght-born William Howard Russell of *The Times*, made a global reputation for themselves as foreign correspondents in the English-language press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They included, in addition to McCullagh, the Limerick-born James David Bouchier (1850-1920), who acted as correspondent for *The Times* in Bulgaria from 1888, and who died and was buried in that country;<sup>2</sup> Emile Joseph Dillon (1854-1933), a Dublin-born scholar who abandoned his studies for the priesthood and became the respected correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* in Moscow from the mid-1880s until 1903, when he became a special adviser to the senior Russian politician and later chairman of the Russian Council of Ministers, Count Witte;<sup>3</sup> Stephen MacKenna, who was appointed by Joseph Pulitzer as head of the Paris Office of the *New York World* in the 1920s; and David McGowan, who became doyen of the foreign correspondents in Russia in 1906 but of whom, regrettably, little else is currently known except that he was, in the intriguing words of one academic authority, 'a glorious mixture of Abraham Lincoln and Mr Micawber'.<sup>4</sup>

Francis McCullagh was born on 30 April 1874 in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, to James and Bridget McCullagh (née McCullagh). His father was a publican, with a premises and dwelling at Bridge Street, and was a native of the Gortin area.<sup>5</sup> A relative, Hugh McCullagh, is listed in the Gortin Trade Directory for 1871 as an innkeeper. He had one brother, who emigrated to New Zealand and who pre-deceased him, and three sisters, two of whom also emigrated, one to New York and the other to Britain. Little more is known about his family, although he noted on one occasion that both his grandfather were farmers who had lived to be more than 90. Two of his sisters, one in England and the other in Ireland, were his only siblings to survive him

His father's politics are unknown. He may well have been a nationalist, but he was also a businessman and, as such, had little option but to accept custom from wherever it came. This is instanced by a vignette in one of McCullagh's articles<sup>6</sup> which recounts how a dozen English dragoons were quartered in his father's house when he was a 'very small boy'. The dragoons, who had arrived in Omagh in anticipation of trouble (which never materialised) at a

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<sup>1</sup> *Tyrone Constitution*, 9 December 1927.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Foley, 'John David Bouchier: an Irish Journalist in the Balkans', in *Irish Communications Review*, 10 (2007), pp. 57-64.

<sup>3</sup> Dillon's papers are in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (Acc.12382).

<sup>4</sup> 'Irishmen who have made Russian history', *Derry Journal*, 9 November 1936.

<sup>5</sup> *Ulster Herald*, 1 December 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Francis McCullagh, 'The Baltic States from an Irish Point of View', in *Studies* xi (1922: March), pp. 29-44: p. 29.

political meeting in the town, were ‘cheerful giants who played with me’. The meeting itself was etched in McCullagh’s memory at least as sharply as were the dragoons: it was organised by Joseph Biggar and other members of the Irish Party. Already observant, the boy noticed that a large room in the town’s principal hotel, in front of which Biggar and his allies were holding their meeting, had been hired by ‘the landlords and Orange magnates of the surrounding district’. McCullagh’s own politics, by the time he wrote this reflection in 1922, had evidently matured. What is also clear is the strength of his prose style: Edwardian certainly, but practised, balanced, mildly ironic, and with the eye for significant detail that is the hallmark of the experienced journalist.

Some of them sat inside, around a table covered with bottles and glasses, from which a genial influence seemed to emanate. Some lounged outside on the balcony, large, rubicund, well-dressed, highly amused, frankly contemptuous. No misgivings as to the future seemed to trouble a single one of them; and they all roared with laughter when poor Joe Biggar, with his crooked back and his squeaking voice, stood up in the wagonette to address that small, frightened assembly of small farmers. Not many of those magnates are left in Ireland now; and such as are left do not laugh.<sup>7</sup> (1922,1: 30).

There is some evidence, which will be explored later, that his nationalism as a young man was more intermittent, although the Christian Brothers’ School in Omagh, which he attended from 1882-1892<sup>8</sup> would undoubtedly have done its best to instil some basic patriotic principles in the growing boy. It certainly brought out the best in him educationally: In the Junior Grade Intermediate Examinations in 1888, he won a £20 exhibition, tenable for three years, as well as Second Class prize of £2;<sup>9</sup> in the Middle Grade examinations in 1890 and the Senior Grade examinations in 1891 he was listed among similarly successful students.<sup>10</sup> After leaving school McCullagh, anxious to establish himself as a journalist, went first to Dublin, where he was unsuccessful in finding work,<sup>11</sup> and thence to Liverpool, where he got work on the *Liverpool Courier*.<sup>12</sup> The *Courier* (1863-1929) was one of that city’s better quality papers, but he then moved (insofar as it is possible to trace an only episodically documented series of career shifts) to a Catholic paper in Bradford owned by Charles Diamond. Diamond was a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party who specialised in rescuing small papers (some of them Catholic papers) which were under-capitalised, often by pooling their resources, and who later became owner of the *Catholic Herald*. The MP had been born in Derry, and it is possible that this may have been a factor in his employment of McCullagh.

Such a promising opening was interrupted by what he interpreted - wrongly, as it turned out - to be a vocation to the priesthood. He therefore went back to Ireland, where he apparently enrolled as a seminarian in St. Columb’s College Derry. The college records are incomplete for this period, so that the details of his studies there are unclear, but an anonymous account which appeared on his death, evidently by a contemporary, gives a substantial amount of detail about him, describing him as ‘one of the ablest and most popular students.’<sup>13</sup> It added: ‘He was quiet, even to shyness, amiable, always anxious to help and of a really unusual serenity of disposition. Though he often had occasion, no one ever saw his frown, and never

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>8</sup> Information from Christian Brothers archivist, Omagh, Co. Tyrone.

<sup>9</sup> *Derry Journal*, 3 September 1888. I am grateful to Dr. Eamon Martin, president, St. Columb’s College, Derry for this and much other information.

<sup>10</sup> *Derry Journal*, 1 September 1890 and 2 September 1891. The 1891 edition deduces from the marks allocated that his and the other names printed are those of exhibition holders, although ‘the list does not give the exhibition winners as formerly.’

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 3 December 1956; obituary of McCullagh.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Onlooker’, *Derry Journal*, reprinted in *Ulster Herald*, 29 December 1956

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

was he known to lose his temper. His proficiency in shorthand was a blessing to those students who were blessed, or otherwise, with faulty memories.<sup>14</sup>

His vocation gradually evaporated, but not his religious commitment, which was to remain a key element in his personal and professional life thereafter, and which not infrequently – as will be seen - embroiled him in national and international controversy. At this stage, the combination of religious commitment and journalistic skill led him, no doubt through his former patron Charles Diamond, to a position on another Diamond-owned paper, the *Scottish Catholic Observer* (founded in 1885), and whose muscular Catholicism can be gauged from its decision virtually to ignore Queen Victoria's visit to that city in 1888, while trumpeting the opening of Celtic Park on the same day.

A third component of his personal and psychological makeup now manifested itself. This was a wanderlust, which was evidently not easily assuaged by Glasgow's parochialism. Where others might have been content with a move to, say, London, McCullagh demonstrated a rare spirit of adventure, getting on a boat and travelling as far as his money would carry him. This was, in the first instance, to Colombo, in Ceylon, where he left the ship with "one golden sovereign" in his pocket,<sup>15</sup> finding employment on a Catholic newspaper there (the *Catholic Messenger*, founded in 1869, and still in existence). He described this experience many years later to Gertrude Gaffney, a senior journalist with the *Irish Independent* who wrote frequently for that paper on a wide range of topics, including international politics: 'In Ceylon the young journalist made his friends among the natives and ignored the white society, which soon earned his contempt. "The Irish out there were the worst of the lot. They became absorbed in the English society and treated the natives like dirt. A native dare not walk on the footpath when one of these people occupied it".'<sup>16</sup>

After some two years in this post, he moved to Bangkok, where he briefly edited a secular paper, the *Siam Free Press*.<sup>17</sup> One obituarist reported that during his time there, he 'headed an expedition against a bandit chief, who had captured a French girl and rode off with her to the hills.' He tackled the bandit almost single-handed and rescued the girl, for which feat he was decorated by the French government.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps more significantly, the publicity attaching to this episode earned him work as a local correspondent for the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*, inaugurating a relationship which was to continue for many years.

The obituaries of McCullagh which appeared principally in local Northern Ireland newspapers (but also *The Times* and the *New York Times*), tend to conflate many of his exploits and sometimes offer conflicting chronologies, but we have McCullagh's own word for it that his next move, to Japan, was as the result of a direct recommendation by the Japanese Chargé d'Affaires in Bangkok to the editor of the *Japan Times*, an English-language paper established in Tokyo in 1897<sup>19</sup>.

Not even these migrations seemed to satisfy him. 'No fun in all that, you know', he told an interviewer in 1927. 'Too much of the same. No getting about.'<sup>20</sup> Within a number of months he was already casting about for other opportunities. At this time his work must have been deeply unsatisfying: he did not write for the paper, but had the responsibility of correcting the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gertrude Gaffney 'Francis McCullagh', *The Capuchin Annual* (1935), pp. 2-26: p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ulster Herald*, 1 December 1956.

<sup>18</sup> *Tyrone Constitution*, 7 December 1956.

<sup>19</sup> McCullagh to editor, *Ave Maria*, 18 January 1900 (Hudson papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, x-4-c).

<sup>20</sup> *Tyrone Constitution*, 9 December 1927.

Japanese editor's English. The salary for this work, 'one hundred gold dollars a month'<sup>21</sup> was undoubtedly a consolation, but not consolation enough. The context of this disclosure was a letter written by McCullagh to the editor of an American Catholic magazine, *Ave Maria*, in which he enquired about the possibility of identifying any opening in that country for a Catholic journalist. He plainly did not much enjoy working for the *Japan Times*, which was 'frankly pagan' (the word 'pagan' was substituted in pen, in his letter, for 'infidel', which he had crossed out in the typescript) and, in addition, he explained that 'on account of a disagreement with the English Colony here on the Boer War I find that the chance of my succeeding is slight.'

What he offered any prospective American Catholic employer was, for a young man of 25, an impressive curriculum vitae coupled with a narrative which explained his intentions in both professional and Catholic terms. He spoke French passably and read it with ease, he told the editor of *Ave Maria*. He also knew a little German, Italian, Latin, and "a very little Greek". His reasons for wanting to move to the United States were manifold.

'In the first place I am writing a long novel which I wish to get published in America, beside a number of small tales: in the second place I wish to devote myself to classical and other studies which, leaving home as I did at a very early age, I had to neglect in my youth – at least to a great extent. I have also an inclination to enter the clerical state: and would like to know if it is a call from God or not: and that, I should imagine, would be best found out in comparative retirement.'<sup>22</sup>

He had, he said, intended to go on retreat to a house established by the Trappists at Hokkaido, but his earnings were not sufficient to enable him to take a long break. His work for the *Herald Tribune* appears to have been interrupted by his move to Japan, but he had begun to explore other avenues: he had by this time already contributed an article on Christianity in Japan to the *North American Review*. His overtures to *Ave Maria* had some effect: his article on "The Rehabilitation of Women in Japan" appeared in the magazine shortly afterwards.<sup>23</sup> It is a fascinating amalgam of observation, piety and reflections on the ways in which Japan was coming to terms with more Western value systems and practices. The circumstances of the recent marriage of the Prince Imperial of Japan, he argued, suggested that the Emperor was 'convinced of the superiority of the European customs in connection with marriage and the respect paid to woman', and he highlighted the example of a Japanese businesswoman, Asa Hirooka of Osaka, who had founded the Kajima banking firm, and had pioneered the coal-mining industry. But, he maintained, the exploitation of women workers was a darker side of Japan, and Christianity alone had the potential to guarantee full human dignity to these women.

'When one sees women toiling half-naked alongside the men and under a burning sun at coaling steamers at Nagasaki and Kobe and Yokohama; when one enters a Japanese factory and finds that what is probably a state of slavery exists there, and when one hears of other places where real slavery of a horrible kind does exist, one realizes that the term "factory girl" as used in Europe is an honorable appellation when compared with what it means when used in Japan.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> McCullagh to editor, *Ave Maria*, 18 January 1900 (Hudson papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, x-4-c). The average wage for a Japanese family of four or five at this time, he noted, was about half a dollar a day.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Francis McCullagh 'The Rehabilitation of Women in Japan, in *Ave Maria* (li) 24, 15 December 1901, pp. 737-741.

<sup>24</sup> McCullagh, *Women in Japan*, p. 741.

When a voucher copy sent to him by the editor, Fr. Daniel Hudson, arrived a month or so later, he replied with what was, in the circumstances, a somewhat unusual request. Instead of a cheque, he asked for a complete set of Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, for which, indeed, he was prepared to pay over and above the no doubt modest fee Fr. Hudson was offering. 'I am sure', he told Fr. Hudson, 'you will sympathise with a Catholic in a place like Tokyo where the second hand bookshops are filled with Huxleys and Spencers but where not even the Imperial Library contains a single Catholic (religious) writer – not even a volume of Newman!'<sup>25</sup> He had begun also, at this time, to move into more academic publications. A later article about the role of the story-teller in Japan was an early indication of an interest which was to re-appear in some later work, and was evidently related to his childhood experiences in Tyrone, has been used as source material by a contemporary scholar.<sup>26</sup>

By 1903 McCullagh's wanderlust got the better of him again. Now evidently a keen observer of international affairs from his privileged vantage point, he had become aware, thanks to his contacts with senior Japanese political figures associated with the *Japan Times*, of the heightened possibility that Japan would attack Russia. At the same time, he decided to 'complete his education in Far Eastern politics' by moving to a Russian paper<sup>27</sup> after having first of all taken lessons in Russian from the chaplain to the Russian legation on Tokyo. In August of the same year he moved to Port Arthur, in Russian territory, and joined the staff of the semi-official *Novi Kraï* (i.e. 'New Land') newspaper, whose editor, Colonel Artemieff, was already aware of his reputation and offered him a role in the forthcoming English edition of that publication. Its semi-official status could readily be deduced from the fact that 'the colonel seemed incapable of writing an editorial unless he were in full uniform, with his sword hanging by his side.'<sup>28</sup> McCullagh settled in well after a period of 'great repulsion for the Russians and an intense dislike for Port Arthur...due to...*une inquiétude de déraciné*' and also 'to homesickness for Japan, whose loveliness now seemed by contrast to be something heavenly.'<sup>29</sup> He then cabled his information about the probability of war, together with an offer of his services, to James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the Paris-based *Herald Tribune*, for which he had contributed occasional articles from Siam some six years previously. He had not at this stage met Bennett personally, but when he did so for the first time in 1905, he was both fascinated and repelled by the life-style of this ex-Catholic (a black mark in McCullagh's book), spendthrift (the New York parent of the Paris paper was hugely profitable), but able and strangely attractive media mogul, whose attitude to his employees was 'a curious mixture of generosity, despotism, trust, suspicion and mercilessness.'<sup>30</sup>

'In Paris, Bennett's life was more like that of an Oriental Sultan than that of an American citizen. I myself was an astounded witness of his glory at that time, for I became connected with the Herald just before the Russo-Japanese war; and I shall never forget the impression of luxury, generosity, carelessness about money, sudden suspicion, illimitable wealth, and unaccountable waywardness made on me by my strange employer.'<sup>31</sup>

Where Bennett's favourite correspondents were concerned, money was literally no object. He once chartered a steamship for McCullagh at Singapore and, when the journalist failed to catch it, limited himself to a mild reproof when they met later: 'Sorry you didn't catch that

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<sup>25</sup> McCullagh to Hudson, 15 January 1901 (Hudson papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, ND archives X-4-d).

<sup>26</sup> Francis McCullagh, 'The Story-teller in Japan' in *East of Asia Magazine*, (1) (1902), pp. 207-220.

<sup>27</sup> Francis McCullagh, *With the Cossacks: Being the Story of an Irishman who Rode with the Cossacks Throughout the Russo-Japanese War* (London 1906; Sandhurst 2006). Citations are from the 1906 edition: p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Francis McCullagh, 'The Gordon Bennetts and American Journalism' in *Studies* cviii (1929) (September), pp. 394-502.: p. 410.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

steamer – it cost me a good deal.’ McCullagh’s estimate was five or ten thousand pounds sterling.<sup>32</sup>

These comments were made in the course of McCullagh’s review of a book about the Bennetts, *père et fils*, and they provide evidence of this reporter’s interest, not just in world affairs as such, but in the strengths and weakness of the members of his own profession. Bennett responded to his offer by taking him on as a special correspondent just before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war, where McCullagh’s initial reputation as a war correspondent was established and enhanced. McCullagh’s initiative not only secured his accelerated entree into the ranks of internationally-known war correspondents: it also generated the first of his many books,<sup>33</sup> which helped to consolidate that reputation and made him something of an international figure in his own right.

Port Arthur, his new base, was also the base for the Russian fleet. McCullagh was temporarily based on a British merchant ship, the ‘Columbia,’ and had (as he remarks with rueful honesty in his book) just cabled a confident despatch to Paris declaring that the Japanese would never attack such an impregnable port, when the Japanese battle fleet arrived close to midnight and began shelling the bay. His book-length account of the war, based largely on his despatches to the *New York Herald*, are disarmingly frank about the degree of terror he experienced at various junctures, and his relief at the fact that the Columbia escaped the shelling from both sides because it was the only vessel in Port Arthur flying a neutral flag – that of Britain. His despatch about the sinking of the Russian fleet was, effectively, a world exclusive, which he secured by travelling from Port Arthur to Chefoo on the Columbia and sending a cable from there to the New York Herald which cost his employers the extraordinary sum, even for those days, of £1,000.<sup>34</sup>

Back in Port Arthur, he joined the entourage of the Russian general Mischenko. At this point his Irish nationalism seems to have gone, perhaps temporarily, into retreat: as he wilts under a Japanese barrage near Liaoyang, he interpretes the cries of *Banzai!* which he hears in the distance as a metaphor for the revengeful cry, of colonised peoples everywhere, ‘for the blood of white men’, and adds: ‘Oh England! Oh, my country! What deed is this thou hast done?’<sup>35</sup> Thirty pages later he has re-imagined himself as an Irishmen, when he compares Chinese farmhouses to ‘the average Connaught cabin’, to the disadvantage of the latter. In Mukden, he goes to Mass regularly in a little shanty, where the congregation displays ‘more devotion than I ever experienced in any of the historic churches of the Continent’<sup>36</sup> and his account of the battle for, and fall of, this city, is vivid. At one point, he describes the frenzy of soldiers let loose on casks of vodka and other supplies: ‘Being Irish, I can understand a crowd of men getting drunk in order to make themselves cheerful, but this was the most sombre crowd of drunkards had ever seen. Instead of making them gay, the drink made them mad.’<sup>37</sup>

Later again, he described himself as the ‘only Britisher’ among a group of foreign correspondents, albeit one possessed of an Irish ‘contrariness’<sup>38</sup>: the ease with which he described himself as one or the other underlines the fact that Ireland was still a part of the British Empire, however recalcitrant a part – and perhaps indicates that not even McCullagh himself felt up to the task of analysing for his colleagues and readers, in the middle of an account of a ferocious battle, the relationship between the two. And yet, when he is

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502.

<sup>33</sup> McCullagh, *With The Cossacks*.

<sup>34</sup> G.G. [Gertrude Gaffney], ‘Leaves from a Woman’s Notebook’, *Irish Independent*, 6 November 1936.

<sup>35</sup> McCullagh, *With the Cossacks*, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

soliloquizing, Ireland's is the flag he flies, as when, in imminent danger of being – as he fears – captured, stripped naked and beheaded by the Japanese, he finds himself longing 'for a consecrated grave on some green hillside in Ireland.'<sup>39</sup> Although he was shortly afterwards taken by the Japanese, his ability to speak their language afforded him some protection, and the Japanese war correspondents, some of whom he had known in Tokyo, greeted him with warmth. His stay with the Japanese was hardly an incarceration: any war correspondent captured by them, he warned, 'runs the risk of degenerating into a sybarite', although there was equally the risk that, should hostilities break out again, Japan would 'permit herself to indulge in the usual barbarities of Christian nations'.<sup>40</sup> For all the hospitality of his new hosts, he found himself longing for 'the society of the rude friendly Cossacks, in whose sad superstitions and songs and mysticism there was so much to remind me of my own folk, the merry, melancholy Gael.'<sup>41</sup> His final verdict was, in at least some senses, prescient:

'The Japanese are bound to have it all their own way in the far east for a long time to come. But I question whether, at the apex of their prosperity, they will enjoy anything like the national happiness which is theirs today. Success will bring satiety. Knowledge will bring disillusionment .... Time and wealth and factory servitude, the great corroders of martial virtue, will gradually take the fine edge from off their valour.'<sup>42</sup> (1906: 392).

It is useful to look at this reportage in the context of the journalistic proclivities of the era. These have been well defined and explored in some detail by Glenn R. Wilkinson<sup>43</sup> who, although he does not mention McCullagh specifically, quotes from one of his despatches to the *New York Herald* as reprinted anonymously in *The Times*<sup>44</sup>, and possibly from others recycled anonymously to the *London Daily News*. In Wilkinson's analysis, descriptions of military force in Edwardian newspapers leaned heavily on social Darwinism – the idea that military campaigns acted in large part to secure the survival and dominance of the fittest and most morally upright nations – as well as on the implicit theory that wars and battles were historically significant or predictive, or that they could usefully be interpreted generally in the context of the threat to European power from races of a different skin colour.

Seen in this context, McCullagh's writing is, relatively speaking, *nuancé*. His predominant sympathies are with the Russians, and he reports their defeats at Port Arthur and Mukden as if they were moral victories, because of the standards of warfare they employed, and no doubt in part because they were a European power. But he surmises openly that the Russians would have treated him less kindly, and might well have executed him, if he had been captured by them as a correspondent reporting from the Japanese side, and he is respectful of Japanese 'valour'. Other journalists, as Wilkinson points out, wrote much more forcefully from a political and racial perspective 'as it was feared that the effect of a Japanese victory would end the illusion of white superiority over the other races.'<sup>45</sup> McCullagh, as will be seen, was not immune to attitudes that can, with the benefit of hindsight, be described as racist in tone, but any elements of racial *hauteur* that they contain, as well as being not untypical of much European writing about non-Europeans in this era, are to a great extent couched in the language of physical rather than in that of moral superiority, and are qualified by his

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375. See also, for some support for this thesis P. A. Towle, (citing McCullagh) 'Japanese Treatment of Prisoners in 1904-1905 – Foreign Officers' Reports' in *Military Affairs* 39 (3) (October 1975), pp. 115-118.

<sup>41</sup> McCullagh, *With the Cossacks*, p. 376.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>43</sup> Glenn R. Wilkinson "'The Blessings of War': The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1), pp. 97-115.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.



occasional willingness to expose and castigate the moral lapses of the European colonial powers, particularly Italy.

McCullagh now entered a phase in which, increasingly, he became part of the story himself – an ever-present temptation for the celebrity journalist, a category to which he had already been admitted at the age of 31. He was a passenger on the liner that brought the Russian negotiator, Count Witte, to New York, for the peace conference arranged by president Theodore Roosevelt. In the course of that voyage, he secured an interview with Witte, and reported the Russian envoy as predicting that the peace conference would not last a week because the Japanese terms were likely to be intolerable. McCullagh filed this despatch by wireless from the ship, and it immediately caused an international storm. Witte denied having used the words attributed to him by McCullagh, and this denial was taken up eagerly, not least by rival US newspapers, and by the London Times of 5 August of that year (1905).

McCullagh retaliated angrily, enlisting in his support the Australian explorer and journalist, Ernest Morrison, an Asian correspondent for the London *Times* whom he had met in Siam in 1897 or 1898 and again in China in 1904.<sup>46</sup> In correspondence with Morrison, now the correspondent for the *Times* in Beijing, McCullagh made it clear that he staked his professional reputation on the accuracy of the report, and appealed to Morrison personally, as someone who had praised his reports from the war.

‘I think I know enough of you to find it unnecessary to assure you that I was never a tool either of the French [i.e. in Siam] or of the Russians and that it was solely my sense of adventure (which I am sure you will understand) that led me to gad about so much in foreign countries.....I know nothing, thank God, of Russian secrets or of the Russian Secret Service. I try to keep my hands clean and the state of my purse is the best proof of this cleanness. I honestly like and admire the common people in Russia.’<sup>47</sup>

He went on to outline the circumstances of his conversation with Witte graphically. Citing the corroborative testimony of other journalists who had also been present at the interview, he added:

‘I won’t even admit that I was tactless, for I am convinced Witte meant that “wireless” to go. He knew I was a reporter, he knew I had been seeking an interview all the voyage and he uttered the phrase which has caused so much discussion, in the manner of a man who has been thinking it over for some time. Lastly, he didn’t bind me to secrecy in any way. I told one of Mr Witte’s staff what his chief had told me, the same evening and before the wireless had gone off and, far from objecting, he helped enthusiastically on the same key, telling me the awful things that would happen to the Japanese if they didn’t give tolerable conditions.’<sup>48</sup>

Witte, in the manner of any politician who realises that he has flown a kite that should be pulled down rapidly, softened the impact of his retraction by suggesting to McCullagh, even before he left the liner, and in the company of several other journalists, that it had been a private conversation which he had not known would be reported – or at least reported so promptly. “How was I to know that you would send it off by wireless telegraphy?” he asked McCullagh, somewhat disingenuously.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The references in this and succeeding paragraphs are to the Ernest Morrison Collection (1905), (49) 381-387, and (50) 293-304, State Library, New South Wales (henceforth *Morrison*)

<sup>47</sup> McCullagh to Morrison, (Undated) 1905, ff. 301-303 *Morrison* (50).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Later the same year McCullagh apparently either changed employers or added to his portfolio of outlets: this was to be a regular feature of his life. Now Tokyo correspondent for (*inter alia*) the *Chicago Daily News*, he was informing his readers of the practices of Japanese spies in Russia, who were ‘pretended converts to the Orthodox Church’ but whose copious marginalia in their Japanese-text bibles turned out, on closer inspection, to be ‘important items of military information that could not have been obtained honestly’.<sup>50</sup> At the same time he was completing his book on the Russo-Japanese war, which he regretfully decided would have to be restricted to one volume (had he told all, it would have taken three), and which was based in part on his despatches to the *New York Herald*.<sup>51</sup> This partial ascription is, in the author’s foreword, further added to by a list of the other publications in which his accounts of the war had appeared. They included the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Dublin Review*, the *New York Times*, the *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, the *Morning Leader*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Times of India*, the *Civil and Military Gazette*, the *North China Daily News*, the *Japan Chronicle*, the *Otago Daily Times*, and – last, but one presumes not least – *T.P.’s Weekly*. This was the first in a remarkable series of books published during the following three decades.

His trail goes cold for a couple of years, with the exception of one brief mention of a visit he made to Morocco, which led to him being expelled from Agadir by the Moors.<sup>52</sup> This is notable in itself for being the only one of his foreign postings about which he did not subsequently publish a book and from which none of his articles survive: in later reminiscences, he made a passing reference to an unsuccessful attempt he made to contact a Moroccan chieftain with an Irish name, whom he assumed was a descendant of one of the captives taken by North African raiders from the Cork town of Baltimore in 1631.

By 1908, he was in Russia. He wrote one article for the *New York Times* in that year, predicting a civil war as the inevitable outcome of the conflict between the Tsar and the Duma (NYT 8 July 1908), but it is probable that his major output at this time was for London papers such as the *Daily News* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. However, shortly afterwards he turns up in Turkey, this time as a correspondent with the Macedonian forces who march against, and defeat, Abd –Ul-Hamid after the fall of Constantinople. Constantinople, he wrote, ‘has now got new masters: slim, clean-built men with the springy step, the bright eye, and the cheerful laugh of the mountaineer. The day of the squat, dreamy, fanatical, and savage Anatolian is over: the day of the keen and energetic Macedonian has come, and with it a new era in the history of Turkey.’<sup>53</sup>

This was in one of a series of articles trumpeted by the *New York Times* between January and June 1909 as giving the most detailed and accurate account of events in Turkey. His subsequent book on the 1908 democratic revolt and the subsequent triumph of the Macedonians against Abd-Ul-Hamid<sup>54</sup> displays an evident fascination with the many cultures of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, and includes a foreword by Mahmud Shefket, then the Turkish Minister of War, who warned presciently that if war breaks out in Europe, ‘it will be kindled by a spark from the east’, and expressed the over-optimistic view that ‘with a strong Turkey it will be possible to keep peace even in the Balkans’.<sup>55</sup> McCullagh witnessed many scenes of savagery which reminded him of ‘what I had read of Ireland after ’98 or Scotland after the ‘45’ ‘<sup>56</sup>, and his willingness to go into the thick of the action evidently required bravery of a high order: he also carried a camera, and this, like most of his books was

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<sup>50</sup> *Newark Daily Herald*, 4 November 1905 (quoting from *Chicago Daily News*, no date given).

<sup>51</sup> McCullagh, *With the Cossacks*

<sup>52</sup> Brief biographical sketch, *The Washington Post*, 18 January 1925.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, 14 May 1909.

<sup>54</sup> Francis McCullagh *The Fall of Abd-Ul-Hamid*, (London: 1910).

<sup>55</sup> Abd-ul-Hamid, ix.

<sup>56</sup> Abd-ul-Hamid, 136.

illustrated with his own photographs. A contemporary reviewer described it as ‘brilliant’:<sup>57</sup> His later books were to receive more decidedly mixed notices.

McCullagh dedicated this book to Allan Ramsay of Constantinople, a British scholar who had a particular interest in the folk tales of Turkey, and who returned the compliment by inviting McCullagh to contribute the preface to his own book on Turkish folktales, published a few years later.<sup>58</sup> McCullagh’s preface, lengthy even by the relaxed standards of the times, is a paean of praise for Turkish culture and humour, and for the Turkish coffee-house (apart from its regrettable exclusion of women) which he regarded as at least the equivalent of the Irish pub for conviviality. The Irish pub in Catholic ownership, at least: he recorded in his preface, with ill-concealed scorn, a notice that he saw in a pub owned by an Orangeman and Covenanter near Belfast in which he observed following notice: ‘Customers are requested to consume their liquor as quickly as possible and then to leave. Some people seem to think that their purchase of a small quantity of liquor at the bar entitles them to remain on the premises as long as they like. This is a mistake.’<sup>59</sup>

In November 1908, while living in Pera, near Constantinople, he was conferred with the Order of St. Sava by King Peter of Serbia. This development, no doubt part of a primitive media management campaign engaged in by various Balkan powers and which targeted particularly British journalists, gave rise to a lengthy correspondence as McCullagh, still of course a British subject, had to apply to the Foreign Office for permission to accept and wear it. J.B. Whitehead, the British envoy in Belgrade, pressed McCullagh for an explanation as to how and why he had been awarded this decoration.<sup>60</sup> McCullagh quoted a Serbian official to the effect that he had been honoured ‘because in your writings and telegrams as correspondent of the *New York Herald* you stated the Servian cause fairly, that it gave the readers of the *Herald* a just idea of its situation, neither closing your eyes to our drawbacks nor believing all the stories that are circulated to our detriment.’<sup>61</sup> This was judged insufficient, but a more formal communication from the Serbian government in August met with official approval, communicated to McCullagh at a new address in Jermyn Street, in London. This was only one of a number of London addresses used by McCullagh which provide compelling evidence both of his standing and his income: others included chambers in Lincolns Inn Fields and the National Liberal Club

He was back in London early in 1910 to report the death of King Edward VII for the *Washington Post*. His report drew sharp comparisons between the ‘sturdy, red-faced countrymen’ he saw in Covent Garden, the gray-haired women “with the air of a country vicarage about them” who had come up for the funeral, and the ‘wastrel men and boys who constitute London’s great eyesore in the early hours (...) Unshaven, furtive-eyed, with trousers that had all run to knee, and buttonless coats which glistened in front like armour, with dilapidated boots, no socks, and rimless hats.’<sup>62</sup> He then found his way to Portugal in time to report, for the same newspaper and also for the *New York Evening Post*, the overthrow of the Portuguese monarchy and the establishment of a new Republic. It was an enterprise for which he evidently had little sympathy. One of his reports<sup>63</sup> poked fun at the near-chaos in the ranks of the new government and decried the regime’s actions in closing down soup-kitchens run by nuns for that country’s poor. This provides evidence of his strong Catholic sentiments, which – unalloyed as they were by any contact with Irish Catholic republicanism - were to

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<sup>57</sup> *American Historical Review*, 16, (1) (1910: October), p. 204.

<sup>58</sup> Allan Ramsay, *Tales from Turkey* (foreword by Francis McCullagh) London and New York, 1915).

<sup>59</sup> Ramsay, *Tales*, xiii.

<sup>60</sup> Correspondence in National Archives, Kew (FO 372/127).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, McCullagh to Whitehead, 5 April 1909.

<sup>62</sup> *Washington Post*, 29 May 1910.

<sup>63</sup> *New York Times*, 21 May 1911: “Portuguese Republicans Fiddling While Rome Burns”. Cf also *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, 15 January 1910, which mistakenly describes him as a “non-Catholic”.

come increasingly to the fore in subsequent years.<sup>64</sup> McCullagh's criticisms, a contemporary report noted, "evidently did not appeal to those in authority and he was quickly escorted over the frontier".<sup>65</sup> It was neither the first nor the last frontier over which he was ejected. It was indicative of McCullagh's standing as a commentator, and perhaps also of the ease with which writers of his rank were in that era welcomed into the pages of academic journals, that, despite his partisan attitude, a detailed analysis of that conflict by him also appeared in the US journal *Nineteenth Century and After*.<sup>66</sup> His partisanship was undoubtedly less of an obstacle to the publication of a similar analysis in an Irish journal – the first occasion, apparently, in which he appeared in print in his own country.<sup>67</sup> His hostility to the Portuguese Republicans, it must be said, was to a degree qualified by his willingness to apply a keenly critical eye to the ousted monarchists. He later wrote of them:

'Even if Napoleon himself were at the head of this [Royalist *émigré*] conspiracy, he could not make a success of it owing to the weakness, the unreliability, and the corruption of the instruments he would have to employ. Up till the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1910 Portuguese politics were a sink of corruption in comparison with which even old Tammany was snow-white and spotless. Half of the old wirepullers and "bosses" have remained and have taken a terrible revenge on the revolution by becoming ardent Republicans and entering the service of the new Government. But it is wholly unreasonable to suppose that any large number of them have changed their nature. The exiled "bosses" are doing more swindling in exile than they ever did at home.'<sup>68</sup>

At this point, McCullagh's experience of warfare suddenly, and to a degree unexpectedly, provoked a reaction and a re-assessment of his own sense of values. In a pamphlet published by the World Peace Foundation in 1911, he launched an astonishing attack on the rapidly emerging global armaments industry, and in particular on capitalists involved in such enterprises, "for their power is tremendous, their wealth almost unlimited, and their patriotism *nil*."<sup>69</sup> Embellished with a wealth of statistical material, his pamphlet accused capitalists of being "hand in glove with all the great jingoistic newspaper proprietors" and noted that whenever war clouds gathered, "it naturally becomes the interest of some powerful group of armament manufacturers to force things to a crisis, while those who want peace are unorganised, unfinanced, and afraid of being denounced as traitors to their country".<sup>70</sup> Identifying another trend which has continued into the twenty-first century, although in language redolent of his own era, he remarks: 'What an enormous supply of discarded arms must find its way into the hands of the inferior races of the Dark Continent? Surely "civilisation" has much to answer for in Africa, beginning with rum and ending with rifles!'<sup>71</sup> Given his strictures on newspaper proprietors, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that he was identified as the author of this pamphlet only by his initials and by his status as the London correspondent of the *New York Evening Post*.

McCullagh's idealism, and even his indignation, had rapidly to cede to the inexorable march of events. He was now writing principally for London newspapers, and his talents were soon engaged for yet another conflict. This was in Libya, where the Italian government, anxious

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<sup>64</sup> A more considered version of his views on the Portuguese revolution can be found in 'Portugal: The Nightmare Republic', *Nineteenth Century and After*, January 1914.

<sup>65</sup> *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, 15 January 1911.

<sup>66</sup> Francis McCullagh, 'Portugal: The Nightmare Republic' pp. 148-170 in *Nineteenth Century and After*, (1914, Jan.), pp. 148-170.

<sup>67</sup> Francis McCullagh 'The Separation of Church and State in Portugal', in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* xxix (1911, June), pp. 595-603.

<sup>68</sup> McCullagh, *The Nightmare Republic*, p.163.

<sup>69</sup> Francis McCullagh, *Syndicates for War: the influence of the makers of war material and of capital invested in war supplies*, (Boston: 1911), p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

not to be left out of the European colonialist process, had launched an opportunist invasion of Tripoli and the surrounding areas, which were under Turkish domination. In the autumn of 1911, he was officially accredited as a war correspondent to the Italian expeditionary force, and was writing for the *New York World*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and the *London Daily News*. His reports for these newspapers formed the basis (sometimes reprinted without any changes) of the book that followed rapidly.<sup>72</sup>

This episode in his career is notable for a number of reasons. One was that, although initially sympathising with the Italians (and doubtless feeling that European civilisation could be of benefit if transplanted to Africa) he was angered and dismayed by the Italian treatment of the native population, and changed his mind about the rights and wrongs of the whole expedition. Another was that he wrote more pointedly about the significance of the geo-politics involved. He was roundly critical of the Catholic Church, the *fons et origo* of his childhood faith. He identified, and sharply criticised, the interests of financial capital in the political process of colonisation (referring, for example, to the Banco di Roma ‘peacefully penetrating Tripoli’).<sup>73</sup> And, like a latter-day John Pilger, he took his sense of outrage to a wider, international stage than that afforded by his articles alone.

Now describing himself as an Irishman, he also embarked on a ferocious bout of media criticism, aimed chiefly but not entirely at the Italian censorship and the self-censorship of the Italian correspondents. The official Italian censorship, in his view, was much more restrictive than that practiced by either the Russians or the Japanese; and Italian policy marked that country out ‘as the militant suffragette of the nations.’ He then extended the metaphor, reflecting the no doubt convivially macho culture of the group of correspondents among whom he found himself.

‘She [Italy] breaks diplomatic, international, hygienic and strategical laws as Miss Christabel Pankhurst breaks windows, and then she raises an ear-splitting, hysterical yell if anyone ventures to criticise her, even if any friend and accomplice attempts to tell her the right way to do it. She goes cruising in the Aegean with her fleet exactly as Mrs. Pankhurst goes cruising in the Strand with her hammer.’<sup>74</sup>

In relation to the geo-political aspect of the conflict, he identified an unwillingness to offend Italy among countries allied to her as the prime reason for the evident self-censorship by correspondents from these countries, at the same time making it clear that, for him, the humanitarian aspects of what was happening were sufficiently grave to override any purely political considerations. One of his own reports, for the *New York* paper, as it happened, was censored by that paper, and he subsequently took pains to include the censored passage in his book. It referred to the Arabs who were defending their homelands as ‘heroes as great as Brescia, or Mazzini, or Garibaldi, or George Washington, or William Tell.’<sup>75</sup> He surmised, no doubt accurately, that this had been suppressed because of its probable impact on *New York*’s many Italian-Americans. Also suppressed were some of the photographs he had taken, which his publishers noted, in a purse-lipped prefatory note, ‘have been found unsuitable for publication in a work intended for general circulation.’

He was fascinated by the ethnic diversity of North Africa, going to considerable lengths to describe its physical and other attributes in terms which make uncomfortable reading in the twenty-first century, but which were probably unexceptionable at the time they were written. The Touareg, he noted, were ‘as reluctant to part with their arms as a very short-sighted man

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<sup>72</sup> Francis McCullagh, *Italy’s War for a Desert: Being some Experiences of a War-correspondent with the Italians in Tripoli*. London, 1912).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxix.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148.

would be to part with his glasse.’ He described ‘smooth-faced black eunuchs’ gazing wonderingly at the Italian *bersaglieri*. ‘In Tripoli,’ he observed, ‘the wily Jew will be sure to benefit by the change of masters, no matter who loses.’ The ‘woolly, shining negroes’ had “long, flexible, india-rubber lips, resembling in the matter of size a pair of bicycle tyres.” The Berbers were ‘bronzed and bony’, and the Arab was ‘a miracle of picturesqueness in his gracious, ample, flowing robes of snowy white’, but the ‘effeminate city Arabs’ left their transparent *burnous* half open ‘so that their embroidered vests and their silk pantaloons may be better seen.’ He concludes:

‘These peoples from widely separated parts of Africa have no more chance of understanding one another’s language than Japanese and Patagonian peasants would have if they happened to meet in a Wapping boarding-house.’<sup>76</sup>

In particular, and more controversially, he focused on two incidents. One was a massacre by Italian troops of captured Arab fighters, which he documented with care. The other was the unpardonable behaviour of the Italian Red Cross, and particularly its plenipotentiary, a Franciscan cleric (and later a curial cardinal) named Giuseppe Bevilacqua. Having come across a starving, wounded boy, McCullagh happened to meet Bevilacqua and asked him to take care of the youth, offering to pay for his treatment. The cleric agreed, but, when McCullagh returned the following day, he found the boy dead at the roadside. The language in which he depicts this fat, self-satisfied and uncharitable friar has a Swiftian tone: “I certainly did not expect him to carry the lad away on his back, though a son of St. Francis of Assisi might not have considered even that beneath him.”<sup>77</sup> Warming to his theme later, he declared: ‘Why should any Christian ecclesiastics continue to chant, like blind pipers, in the wake of speculative banks or millionaire wire-pullers or Agnostic politicians? They might as well sing Te Deums to celebrate successful swindles on the Stock Exchange.’<sup>78</sup>

McCullagh eventually decided that since he was becoming so critical of the Italians he should return his accreditation papers, which – together with a similarly disenchanting German correspondent – he did, leaving Tripoli for Malta in order to be able to send his despatches without fear of censorship. In his he prefigured, perhaps, the dilemma of the ‘embedded’ correspondent in the Iraq wars of the twenty-first century. His verdict was damning. ‘Italy has got a nice handful. Like Dead Sea fruit, Tripoli has turned to dust and ashes in her grasp. She wanted to annex territory. She has annexed sand, poverty, rags, misery, cholera and corruption. Was it necessary for her to go abroad? Has she not got enough of these commodities at home?’<sup>79</sup>

His return to London was the occasion for a major controversy. W.T. Stead, the prototype of the British investigative journalist and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had been so impressed by McCullagh’s despatches that he invited his fellow-journalist to address a public meeting on the topic. McCullagh demurred, but Stead forced him into it by hiring a hall and presenting him with a *fait accompli*. ‘I must’, Stead told him, “throw you into the deep water as a father throws a boy of whom he wants to make a swimmer.”<sup>80</sup>

This had two consequences, both of them dramatic. The meeting itself was broken up by seven Italians who shouted McCullagh down. Even more surprisingly, McCullagh was visited unexpectedly soon afterwards at a house in Surrey (where he was writing his book on Tripoli) by three Italians: F.T. Marinetti, a poet, who later became one of Mussolini’s favourite writers; an Italian artist of the futurist school named Boccioni, who was then holding an exhibition in London; and a third person who did not give his name but whom McCullagh

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, pp. 78-80.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 271.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 392.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.89.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 266.

believed was the London correspondent of the *Giornale d'Italia*. The object of their visit was to challenge McCullagh to a duel, which he politely declined, whereupon Signor Marinetti 'got on his legs and began an oration which lasted a quarter of an hour, and afforded me a good deal of amusement.'<sup>81</sup> In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that one reviewer of his book noted that 'it would have gained from a more restrained presentation.'<sup>82</sup>

In 1912-1913 he was back in the Balkans, where he reported on virtually every phase of the complex sets of hostilities that accompanied the collapse of the Ottoman empire, and on the various peace conferences which attempted to achieve stability in the region. Much of his reportage in this period appears to have been for the London *Daily News*, a liberal paper owned by the Cadbury family, which was to merge with the *News Chronicle* in the 1920s. At one point, travelling with the Turkish Army, he was captured by the Bulgarians. Such was his fame that the quashing of a rumour that he had been killed after having been captured went rapidly around the world as a news story in its own right, as did the subsequent report that he was still alive.<sup>83</sup> He was released after the intervention of the British Ambassador in Sofia.

By now, however, the war that had long been expected in Europe, not least because of the Balkan conflicts, was on the point of eruption. McCullagh, who had moved to Paris, immediately re-visited his old roots by attaching himself to the Russian Army in the early phases of its campaign in Poland. Sir Bernard Pares, a noted Russian scholar who had evidently come to know him by virtue of his experiences and writings in 1904-5, noted that McCullagh, whose grasp of Russian was certainly passable by this stage, was very popular with the Russian common soldiers, and did not hesitate to expose himself to danger with them. When he was once asked why he chose to go so close to the front during the conflict, he replied disarmingly that it was because he was shortsighted.<sup>84</sup>

Not even his acknowledged status as a war correspondent was, however, sufficient to protect him from the political agendas of the newspapers for which he wrote. There is a problem in identifying the newspapers to which he contributed at this time, and the likelihood is that they were British publications, because the correspondents of such newspapers were not normally identified by name (in contrast to US newspapers which frequently gave name by-lines to correspondents of McCullagh's prominence). According to an Irish journalist who interviewed him many years later, 'finding his despatches changed out of all recognition by the time they appeared, he threw up his job in disgust and took a commission in the [British] Army in order to see war from the soldier's standpoint.'<sup>85</sup>

McCullagh applied to join the Royal Worcestershire Regiment, then stationed in Plymouth, and was commissioned as a lieutenant on 8 December 1914.<sup>86</sup> In his application form he described himself as "British born", and, with no doubt a hint of pride, answered the question about his ability to ride a horse with a reference to his "two years in Manchuria with the Cossacks". His gave Alexander Scott MP as his character reference and, in case any information about his educational standard was needed, nominated as his referees Edward Browne, Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, and (as if to complete the double) Sir Thomas McAdam, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge. His application was enthusiastically accepted on behalf of the regiment on 25 November 1914 but by the end of that year he had transferred to the Royal Irish Fusiliers, where he was gazetted as a lieutenant. No reason is given for his sudden change of allegiance, but there is perhaps a hint of his motivation in an interview he

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. xxiii.

<sup>82</sup> Review by F.R.C. in *The Geographical Journal* (40) (Nov., 1912), pp. 552-553.

<sup>83</sup> See for instance *Van Wert Daily Bulletin*, 23 November 1912.

<sup>84</sup> *Derry Journal*, 9 November 1936: account of lecture at RDS, Dublin, by Sir Bernard Pares.

<sup>85</sup> *Leaves*, p. 22.

<sup>86</sup> National Archives, Kew, WO 339/21565, from which all references in this section are drawn, unless otherwise specified (Otherwise WO 339/21565)

gave later in which he noted that on the journey out to the Dardanelles in August 1915, he 'was so disgusted at the swarms of brass hats which filled [HMS Aragon] that he asked to be sent to Suvla Bay as a regimental officer.'<sup>87</sup>

There, he took command of "A" Company, the Fifth Irish Fusiliers, and subsequently extended his command activities to the Sixth Irish Fusiliers, which had lost all its officers. This was hardly surprising: these troops and others were engaged in a more or less permanent, and unsuccessful, series of assaults on an eminence known as Scimitar Hill, which was being defended by Turkish forces under the command of a little-known young Ottoman colonel named Mustafa Kemal – who became better known later as Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.

McCullagh was sent to Salonika in July 1916, after the Dardanelles offensives had effectively been abandoned. The remainder of his war record is shrouded in obscurity, although the formal description of his activities – he was attached to the GHQ of the Intelligence Corps - in all probability concealed a substantial, intelligence role, not least in the light of his linguistic abilities. The possibility deliberate confusion about his role was reflected in the description of him accompanying a photograph taken by a *Chicago Daily News* photographer in January 1916, in which he is described as a 'War Correspondent'. Although he had been certified (by a fellow-countryman and doctor, Lieut. D. O'Connell from Tipperary) as being in good physical health and fit for active service on 16 May 1915, by 1917 he was suffering from chronic middle ear disease, nervous debility and neurasthenia, and this persisted until March 1918 when, apparently as a result of exposure to shellfire in the previous year, he was described as 'thin and pale, sleeps badly and has a poor appetite'. The experience, he told a journalistic colleague later, 'was such a nightmare that he has so far been unable to write a book about it.'<sup>88</sup> Given his facility with pen and type-writer, this self-denying ordinance spoke volumes for the horrors of that particular theatre of war. He never wrote about it subsequently, despite producing half a dozen books between then and the end of his journalistic career.

At the beginning of 1918,<sup>89</sup> McCullagh found himself at a bit of a loose end. He applied in January to resign his commission, but made it clear that he would be available for suitable work if the Army wanted him. He was, he reminded his superiors, acquainted with 'all the great Manchurian landowners, who are not at the head of the present [anti-Bolshevik] movement.' He added, in a cascade of dropped names: 'My qualities are known to Mr MacPherson, under-Secretary for War (whom I met in Russia on the day of England's declaration of war against Germany), Sir George Buchanan, British Ambassador to Russia (I knew him in Petrograd and when, previous to that, he was in Sofia he induced the Bulgarians to release me after I fell into their hands during the Turkish retreat).'<sup>90</sup> His willingness to leave the service was perhaps influenced by his posting to the section of Army administration dealing with labour issues where, according to one of his officers, he seemed 'wasted. The same officer suggested that 'perhaps he should be offered to MI6, who need men with elastic linguistic brains, such as are indicated by a knowledge of 10 languages.'<sup>91</sup>

It might not have been easy, in the immediate aftermath of Easter 1916, for an Irish-born officer (especially one from a Northern county) to secure continuing military employment, but this was not the only reason for the distinctly cool response to his overtures. His command of languages was assessed somewhat negatively in May 1918: 'We do not have much confidence in his powers as a linguist', Captain V. Spencer of Military Intelligence

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<sup>87</sup> *Leaves*, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> Service note, 4 May 1918, National Archives, Kew (WO 339/21565)

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, McCullagh letter, 30 January 1918.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, unsigned memorandum, 2 March 1918.



reported somewhat brusquely in May, even before he had been tested. A month later, Major Kerry of Military Intelligence, another of several sceptics, offered an assessment indicating that, whatever about McCullagh's linguistic skills, he might be an awkward customer in other respects. 'I have seen this officer and do not consider that he would be suitable for employment in this branch. His experience seems to have been entirely confined to writing on Russia and eastern subjects, and we require more varied stuff. In addition I find he does not desire to undertake work of the nature he would be required to do here.'<sup>92</sup>

Within a month, there was a dramatic turnaround in the assessment of his suitability for further service. McCullagh, Captain Iggleston of Military Intelligence wrote, was 'urgently required for employment under the MI Directorate.'<sup>93</sup> Within weeks, McCullagh had an appointment with the formidable General Sir Alfred Knox, the military commander of the expeditionary force being prepared to go to Siberia to defend and even develop British interests in the region in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution.<sup>94</sup> His linguistic skills, formerly considered redundant, were now highly prized, and he was formally attached to Knox's propaganda unit, and accorded the special Russian allowance of £20, presumably for the purpose of acquiring appropriate clothing. He was also given the temporary rank of captain with effect from 10 September 1919.

Much of what we know about his activities in Siberia from this point onwards comes from his letters to Sir Bernard Pares. Pares, who was head of the School of Russian Studies at the University of Liverpool, and then of King's College, London, and a friend of Kerensky, was probably the foremost British authority on the Russian revolution, and made a lengthy trip through Russia early in 1919.<sup>95</sup> He had known McCullagh for some time, having undoubtedly been fascinated by McCullagh's accounts of his experiences during the Russo-Japanese War: in 1919 he was describing him as 'an old acquaintance'.<sup>96</sup> McCullagh wrote frequently and confidentially to Pares from Siberia with a considerable amount of personal information,<sup>97</sup> as well as partial copies of his intelligence reports for Knox.

This correspondence, and these reports,<sup>98</sup> provide ample evidence both of his keen (if somewhat unrealistic) commercial sensibilities, and of his more developed skills in political communication. On the commercial side, he saw 'advantageous openings' for British capital in the paper-making business in Siberia, observing that "if the risks are great, the profits may be stupendous". Somewhat unrealistically, he suggested that work could be found in Siberia for unemployed skilled British paper-workers, adding that 'the Japanese and the Germans must be kept out'.<sup>99</sup> He was on more familiar territory when it came to political communication, noting that 'my position as an officer facilitates relations with [the Russian propaganda operation], while at the same time the civilian outlook and the practical knowledge of journalism which four years in the army have not made me lose, enable me to be of more use to the Russians as an adviser on popular propaganda than a regular military officer would be.'<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., note to MI6 C from Major Kerry, 3 June 1918.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 3 July 1918.

<sup>94</sup> Arno F. Kolz, 'British Economic Interests in Siberia during the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920' in *The Journal of Modern History*, (48) 3 (Sep., 1976), pp. 483-491

<sup>95</sup> Siberian Log of Sir Bernard Pares, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London (PAR 6/9/1). Extracts from McCullagh's correspondence cited infra are from PAR 6/9/2.

<sup>96</sup> Pares, *Siberian Log*, 4 March 1919, (PAR 6/9/1).

<sup>97</sup> School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London (PAR 6/9/2)

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Francis McCullagh, Propaganda Report No. 3, Omsk, 22 July 1919 School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London (PAR 6/9/2).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

He bemoaned the lack of back-up from military intelligence sources in London, which allowed rivals like the French in London to appear as the champions of the White Russians. His propaganda insights generally outpaced his attempts at commercial acumen. One of the key issues the British forces faced in this regard was how to organise press support for the Russians. Conventional wisdom suggested that the British should themselves print and publish a paper in Russian, whose content they could of course control, but, writing to Pares from Vladivostok, McCullagh had other ideas.

‘The establishment of (...) a paper would only arouse the jealousy of the Russians and do harm instead of good. This paper [*The Echo*] has now been established at a total cost of £30,000. The machinery was all imported and is the best in Siberia. But, as I foretold, the Russians hate it like poison and circulate the most damaging rumours about it. Even if the editorship of the paper is changed, the trouble will continue, for Russian journalists are an easy-going class and it will be impossible to supervise them properly. Best leave them to their own newspapers. We can do infinitely more good by remaining, unseen, in the background and supplying their newspapers with news.’<sup>101</sup>

McCullagh’s ‘practical knowledge of journalism’ was allied to a keen sense of the political in his declaration that he planned to put all his assistants through ‘a course of instruction in the laws of evidence’. Statements characterised by looseness and inaccuracy, he observed would be ‘torn to shreds by British critics like Col. Wedgewood MP’. This could be avoided if informants (mainly refugees) were put through a stiff cross-examination, which would be facilitated, he argued, by the provision of an entertainment allowance, and which would eventually be able to ‘turn out matter fit to produce in the House of Commons.’<sup>102</sup> He suggested that the Archbishop of Canterbury should be asked to send bibles, but with “no proselytism, no controversial matter, no statements on Jews or on other Christian churches”, and urged the organisation of an exhibition of anti-Bolshevist cartoons from all over the world.<sup>103</sup>

This correspondence is also notable for the links it discloses between the media and the intelligence services at the time, and the close eye that was kept on journalists by the military. McCullagh told Pares that the correspondent of *The Times* in Siberia, whom he identified only as ‘W,’ was regarded as being so much in the pocket of the White Russians that Knox cabled Wickham Steed in London to have him removed.<sup>104</sup> When Col. Knox asked the War Office if McCullagh could be allowed to earn some money by writing for some of the London papers, he got permission to allow him to do so as long as the articles were unsigned.<sup>105</sup> McCullagh also wrote to the *Spectator* asking for books for review. McCullagh wrote to Pares about these matters in the context of his increasing annoyance at the fact that his promotion from lieutenant to captain had been made only in an ‘acting’ capacity, and that he now risked being reduced to the rank of lieutenant again. ‘This’, he told Pares, ‘would injure me in the eyes of the Russians (...) I have had five years in the army now and to be merely acting captain is not good enough. I want to make the War Office realise that a writer has his pride.’<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> McCullagh to Pares, 4 July 1919, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London (PAR 6/9/2)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, 31 July. Col. Wedgewood was a Liberal MP who joined the Labour Party in 1919 and was noted for his independent views.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, 19 August 1919.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, 1 September 1919.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, 1 November 1919.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. McCullagh to Pares, undated, but between 9 September 1919 and 1 November 1919.

McCullagh was finally confirmed in his rank as captain on 26 November 1920 (WO 339/21565).

Warming to his theme, he commented in a subsequent missive: ‘Blair brought home a report recommending my promotion to major. It is a small point but Donohoe of the *Chronicle* who made £200 clear profit during each of the first four years of the war and then joined the army intelligence was made major. I think they wanted to make him propaganda officer in Russia but apparently the few hundred a year they offered him was not tempting enough and he is now back at the *Chronicle*, probably on his old salary.’<sup>107</sup>

He was plainly both fascinated and repelled by the phenomenon of Bolshevism. At one point he noted that the “stern discipline” of the Bolsheviks soon turned their raw recruits into good soldiers.<sup>108</sup> He also wrote to ask Pares to send him a copy of Trotsky’s “Russian Revolution,” and expressed a strong desire “to become a real authority on Bolshevism”.<sup>109</sup>

This desire was to be postponed, but the preparations for it enhanced, by what happened next. By 1 November 1919 he was telling Pares that the retreat on which the British and Russian forces were then engaged would mean the end of the Kolchak government. The Bolshevik advance, although sporadic and somewhat uncoordinated, turned the retreat into a rout. McCullagh volunteered to take the place of a sick British officer with a small British force in Omsk. When the fall of Omsk became inevitable, this mission left Omsk by train for Krasnoyarsk. The journey took nearly two months, because of the difficulty of getting water and fuel for the engine. When they got there on, 6 January 1920, they found the town occupied by three regiments of the Red Army, which had travelled from Tomsk by sleigh, avoiding the railway line. McCullagh explained later: ‘As we only numbered 14 officers and other ranks and in view of surrender of all the [anti-Bolshevik] Russians without resistance, we had to surrender also, and escape was rendered impossible not only by the presence of the red Guards and by the fact that we were deprived of our weapons but also by the cold and the deep snow.’<sup>110</sup>

After a hiatus when the Bolsheviks appeared to be unsure as to what to do with the British (with whom they were technically not at war), all foreign nationals were instructed to register with the authorities. At this point McCullagh, with the approval of his comrades, ‘went about the Bolshevik leaders representing myself as a newspaper correspondent.’<sup>111</sup> In this chaotic situation, his deception, enhanced by his fluent Russian and by his production of a volume of newspaper cuttings about himself – some of them in Russian, which was as good as a passport – was successful. McCullagh now represented himself as a foreign correspondent to a senior Soviet official, Commissioner Sverdlov who, ‘like all the commissioners, had been a bit of journalist himself,’ and with whom he immediately struck up a cordial relationship.

Sverdlov, and other Soviet officials whom he met thereafter, kept pressing him to write articles for them, offering him substantial amounts of money, but he fobbed them off with various excuses and travelled ‘masquerading in a mushik’s sheepskin *polshubok*.’ On one occasion, in Ekaterinburg, he succeeded in effecting entrance to a meeting of the provincial Soviet: ‘I sat in my peasant’s sheepskin coat at the reporter’s table, and tried, with a success so great as to be almost disquieting, to look as plebeian as possible.’<sup>112</sup>

Ekaterinburg was his most significant waypoint in his journey from Krasnoyarsk to Moscow by train, which took several months, partly because of the congestion and inefficiency of the railway network, partly because of his inclination to indulge his journalistic sensibilities

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<sup>107</sup> McCullagh to Pares, 1 November 1919 (PAR 6/9/3).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, McCullagh to Pares, 31 July 1919.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* McCullagh to Pares, 1 September 1919.

<sup>110</sup> Voluntary statement by Captain McCullagh, 8 June 192, National Archives, Kew (WO 339/21565).

<sup>111</sup> Report by Capt. F. McCullagh, BMM Siberia, written in Finland, 22 April 1920, National Archives, Kew (WO 106/1279). Other unsourced quotations in this section are all from this document.

<sup>112</sup> Francis McCullagh, *A Prisoner of the Reds* (London: 1922), p. 119.

whenever and wherever he could. Ekaterinburg was a town he had visited twice earlier as part of his intelligence work for the British Military Mission, once in 1918 when it was occupied by Czech troops, and again in 1919 when it had been occupied by Kolchak's Cossack troops and by a battalion of the Hampshire regiment.<sup>113</sup> The significance of the name would not have escaped McCullagh or any of his companions: this was the place where, earlier in 1918, Tsar Nicholas and the rest of the Romanov family had been killed by their captors. That much was known, but the details available were scanty. Kolchak carried out some sort of investigation but, apart from finding a few personal items which had belonged to the Russian royal family, did not seem to have been able to put together any detailed version of what had happened.

McCullagh now had an opportunity to add to whatever information he had garnered on his earlier visit and – with luck – get a world journalistic exclusive into the bargain. He was to get his exclusive in an article he wrote and published immediately after his repatriation from Moscow the following year, but the version in his book<sup>114</sup> is much fuller and – even though he names no sources to protect the identities of those who spoke to him on any one of his three visits – bears the stamp of the trained observer and interviewer. He came to the conclusion, for example, that the Tsar and his family had not been killed on the orders of the Kremlin, but by their local jailers who had been warned by the Kremlin that if the royal family escaped they would pay for it with their lives, and who had panicked in the face of what they believed was the imminent capture of the town by advancing Czech soldiers.

His most daring initiative on this occasion was to seek a face-to-face interview with Yurovsky, by common consent the officer who had been in charge of the execution squad. Since the Tsar's death and the recapture of Ekaterinburg by the Red Army, Yurovsky had returned to the town, where he had been appointed – with no sense of irony that one can detect, but which struck McCullagh as somewhat macabre – Inspector of Life Insurance for the Ekaterinburg province, and had been allocated one of the largest houses in the town, directly opposite the building in which the Tsar and his family had died. He was at this time, it appears, shunned by almost all except his immediate family and members of the local Communist organisation.

‘Sergiev, the hunchbacked war correspondent of the *Pravda*, and one of the most callous and thoroughgoing Bolsheviks in Russia, came all the way from Moscow to see Yurovsky, but, when he arrived in Ekaterinburg and was pointed out that shunned and darkened house, he decided to send his assistant to photograph the regicide, and never once crossed the threshold himself.’<sup>115</sup>

McCullagh, who managed to locate and interview the young photographer, decided to go one better, and called at Yurovsky's house, introducing himself as a foreign correspondent eager to learn about the achievements of the Soviet system of life insurance in the Ekaterinburg province, and was admitted. Yurovsky, he wrote,

‘wore a great black fur coat or *shuba* which reached to the ground, and underneath it were pyjamas, for apparently he had not dressed. On his feet he wore cloth slippers, and his whole appearance gave me the impression that he had been asleep when I knocked; for, perhaps, like Cromwell, he does not sleep well o' nights. I tried to overcome a strong feeling of repugnance which swept over me as I reached out my hand and clutched the limp, clammy and rather unwilling hand which hung by his side, the hand which had murdered the Tsar.’<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. 108.

<sup>114</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, pp. 108-185.

<sup>115</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. 145.

<sup>116</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. 148.

It was an extraordinary, surreal interview, as McCullagh - with his prize now, as it were, within reach - came to the conclusion that it was actually too dangerous to broach the events of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1918 in his conversation with Yurovsky, and discussed with him instead, in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and no little tension, the finer details of the new system of Soviet life insurance. 'It was an interview in which both parties used words only in order to conceal their thoughts; but in which they were so unsuccessful that the entire setting had been like a hair raising spiritualist *séance* at which men read each other's thoughts written on their foreheads and see corpses rise from their graves.'<sup>117</sup> It was also one of those rare occasions on which an interviewer achieves world-wide fame for never having asked the question that everyone would have expected him to ask.

*A Prisoner of the Reds*, quite apart from this episode, is one of the most fascinating books written about Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. McCullagh's judgments are as interesting as his observations. He is frank about the atrocities committed by the White Russians, and which he witnessed personally – far more frank than in his official report to British military intelligence after his return to London. He devotes almost an entire chapter to Trotsky, whose frugality, energy and leadership qualities he evidently admired, but whose atheism negated all these estimable qualities in his eyes. He is scathing about the inefficiencies of the White conspirators in Moscow, to whom he gave a wide berth, and about the theology and the organisation of the Russian Orthodox Church, which had in any case been mercilessly targeted by the new regime. He wrote with a mixture of fascination and disdain about the news management systems prevalent under Bolshevism, and gave a fascinating pen-portrait of Chicherin, the de facto Foreign Minister, whose office, from which he managed the press censorship, was 'more like a small Labour club over a public-house during the progress of a strike, than the headquarters of an important Government department.'<sup>118</sup>

He eventually arrived in Moscow, where he successfully extended his deception to include the Soviet Foreign Ministry. He then spent his time giving the British Embassy in Moscow details about the British troops captured in Siberia, and attempting to persuade the Soviet authorities (who were only dimly aware of their captives' existence) to release them. His disguise as a journalist still intact, he was made welcome in one of the new Soviet guest houses for important foreign visitors. As he described it in one of a series of articles written after his repatriation and widely syndicated in the United States, these guest houses were cross roads of international intrigue and ideological chaos.

'The collection of hopes, panics, greeds, secrecies, cunnings, treacheries and idealisms which jostled one another in those amazing guest houses of the soviets transcended in interest anything I ever saw, read or imagined. Secret agents of foreign powers who posed as Bolsheviks jostled open agents of foreign powers who really leaned towards Communism. Quakers who did not believe in war at all defended militarism against Italian naval officers who, after fighting for three years, had become pacifists. Korean Buddhists, who thought it a sin to kill a rattlesnake, advocated the assassination of the Mikado. Mahomedans, whose religion is the sword, tried to prove that the prophet was really a man of peace. Financiers wanted the abolition of finance. Respectable married men suddenly remembered that they had got married again that afternoon according to soviet law, having duly divorced that morning before a Bolshevik commissar their lawful wives beyond the sea. Diplomats, who knew nothing, fished delicately for information from low-class labour journalists who, having just dined with Trotsky, knew everything.'<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, pp. 152.

<sup>118</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. 249.

<sup>119</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1920.

The suspicious authorities eventually arrested him and imprisoned him in the Lubyanka.<sup>120</sup> Surprisingly, his captors were, and remained, unaware of military status. Put in solitary confinement, he cheered himself up by singing Thomas Moore's "The Minstrel Boy", and composing speeches on Russian topics. After a number of days, and a sequence of interrogations which, by his own account, were not particularly intimidating, and somewhat to his surprise, he was released. He is unusually reticent about the details of this episode, probably because some of those who had helped him were still in Moscow and identifying them might have put lives or careers at risk. One of them, evidently, was an American diplomat, whom he attempted to find and thank in person in 1927. However, by the time he had tracked down his – still unnamed – benefactor in Boston, it was to discover that the man had very recently died.<sup>121</sup>

McCullagh (still technically a civilian) was repatriated from Russia, via Finland under the Brest-Livotsk Agreement, and arrived back in London on 26 May 1920. En route, he contributed the detailed statement cited above which was forwarded by British diplomats in Helsinki to the War Office with some urgency in the light of its extremely detailed information about Soviet military capabilities and tactics, including Trotsky's plans for the Red Army, which Sverdlov had outlined to him. The assistant military *attaché* in Helsinki, in an accompanying note, observed:

'Captain McCullagh's wires, when in captivity in Soviet Russia, rather gave the impression that he had become somewhat converted to Bolshevik ideas; but he explains how, with the concurrence of the other British officers taken with him, he passed as a journalist in order to get home quickly and in order to help these officers by informing HMG of these circumstances. In referring to these he is a little apologetic – but there does not appear to be any doubt whatever as to his genuineness'.<sup>122</sup>

A War Office note<sup>123</sup> of an interview with McCullagh stated that he both spoke and wrote the following languages: French, Russian, Bulgarian ("rather weak"), German, Serbian, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and added that he spoke "a little Chinese and Japanese". Not even this linguistic dexterity, however, was sufficient to ensure his continued employment in the British Army, and indeed there is not much evidence that this is what he desired. He was gazetted out of the service with effect from 25 October 1920, and with an MBE as a reward for his experiences as a prisoner of war. A week earlier he had called on his superiors and told them that he was about to re-embark for Russia: the official note of this conversation observed somewhat tetchily that the interviewing officer was "unable to state how he has been employed since his return from Russia".<sup>124</sup> In fact, he had been extraordinarily busy, writing a series of articles for British and American papers about his experiences, and preparing the text of the book which was further to enhance his reputation – *A Prisoner of the Reds*.

Possibly the first, and certainly the most dramatic, of his newspaper articles was an account of the events in Ekaterinburg on 16 July 1918, when the Tsar and his family had been assassinated, based on his various visits to that city. An Associated Press despatch<sup>125</sup> credits two journalists with breaking the news in British newspapers on the same day: McCullagh (whose paper is not identified but was presumably the London *Daily News*) and Robert Wilmot, *The Times* former correspondent in Petrograd, and quite possibly the "W" of

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<sup>120</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. 269.

<sup>121</sup> *Tyrone Constitution*, 9 December 1927.

<sup>122</sup> 12 May 1920. WO 106/1279.

<sup>123</sup> 29 July 1920, National Archives, Kew (WO 339/21565).

<sup>124</sup> 18 October 1920, National Archives, Kew (WO 339/21565).

<sup>125</sup> See *Daily North Western*, 30 August 1920, one of a number of newspapers worldwide that would have published the story.

McCullagh's letters to Sir Bernard Pares. Both journalists, the news agency reported, "spent several weeks at Ekaterinburg, and talked with natives and soldiers who witnessed the affair through the windows of the ill-fated house. Both writers agree on the important details of the story." One of the few points of disagreement was about the nationality of the dozen or so soldiers who were guarding the Romanovs." McCullagh described them as Letts, Wilmot as Magyars. Both, however, agreed that these soldiers were chosen because of Yurovsky's fear that native Russian soldiers might have hesitated to participate in the killings. Almost immediately, McCullagh's detailed account, complete with diagrams of the house in which the murders had taken place, were re-published in October 1920 in the American journal, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, which gave its author further prominence in the US newspapers.<sup>126</sup>

These initial revelations were rapidly succeeded by a number of articles detailing his very recent experiences in Russia, and which were syndicated in a number of US newspapers, notably the *Los Angeles Times*. In the first of a series of reports for that paper, dramatically entitled 'Red Czar of All Russia Leading Isolated Life: Lenine, Cut Off Like a Leper from All Governments, Yet Keeps in Touch With Dangerous Persons'<sup>127</sup> he gave a graphic description of Lenin (spelt, after the fashion of the time, "Lenine") addressing the ninth Communist convention 'like the chairman of a London tea house company reading out an unsensational annual report which most of his hearers knew already.' His political criticisms of Lenin, the 'arch-conspirator' were, interestingly, counter-pointed by a savage attack on the 'gang of international concession hunters' who now besieged the Kremlin. They represented, in McCullagh's jaundiced view,

'the most inhuman and aggressive aspect of that capitalism which the Reds have sworn to destroy, and yet they made friends with the Reds and hobnobbed with Lenine (...) the capitalists of California and South Africa will be paupers in point of wealth and cowards in point of courage compared to the hard-bitten plutocrats who may arise out of this Russian chaos.'<sup>128</sup>

In other articles, he wrote amusedly about the answer given by an Irish-American communist to a Soviet official who had asked him to write the history of the agrarian movement in Ireland, presumably to offer Russian farmers a template to copy. The Irish-American, with a better grasp of Irish history than the Russian official, warned him that he did not know what he was asking for: if Russian peasants learned how Irish peasants had united to throw off the yoke of the oppressor, he implied, they might take the wrong lesson from such an example.<sup>129</sup>

These articles were often illustrated by his own photographs: one newspaper printed two, one showing Trotsky and others cheering a speech by Lenin, the other showing housewives shopping in a market 'where trade is permitted on capitalistic lines.'<sup>130</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* was among the newspapers which trumpeted his credentials. McCullagh, it told its readers, 'is a highly trained journalist of international reputation. He is the only man of his profession who has gone his way through Russia unattended, unsuspected, and perfectly free since that country came under the sway of Bolshevism.'<sup>131</sup>

In the final article of this syndicated series, McCullagh gave a detailed account of the near-collapse of the food production and distribution system which was in part due to the

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. for example *Iowa Daily News*, 20 October 1920, which published extracts from his article in *Nineteenth Century and After*.

<sup>127</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1920.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, 4 December 1920.

<sup>130</sup> *Nevada State Journal*, 31 August 1920.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

resistance by Russian peasants, the *muzhiks*, to collectivisation and to the destruction of the traditional markets for their produce. ‘The *muzhik* is the sphinx of the situation. Lenine storms at him and calls him a capitalist. Trotzky takes his sons and makes Red soldiers of them and sends them back to the villages to preach the gospel of Karl Marx. The sphinx smiles and says nothing, but Lenine likes neither that smile nor that silence.’<sup>132</sup>

This was one of a number of articles in which McCullagh boldly predicted the imminent return of Russia to capitalism, and perhaps even to liberal democracy, as – in his view – Lenin’s experiment was doomed to collapse under the combined weight of ideology and bureaucracy. Writing from Rival (now Tallin, the capital of Estonia) in 1921, he confidently, but mistakenly, interpreted Lenin’s speech to the Tenth Communist Congress – the so-called “New Economic Policy” speech – as an implicit abandonment of many core Communist beliefs.<sup>133</sup> He interviewed an unnamed Russian scientist in New York who discerned that Lenin’s ‘surrender to foreign capital’ would mark the end of Bolshevism.<sup>134</sup> Shortly afterwards he returned to Russia, no doubt in eager anticipation of such an eventuality, and articles by him datelined Moscow again began to appear in US newspapers.

He was formally appointed as the Moscow correspondent of the *New York Herald* again in 1922. Some circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that British military intelligence, from which he had so very recently parted company, unexpectedly had a fresh role and interest in his activities there. This evidence was provided by one of his journalistic contemporaries in the Russian capital, Marguerite Harrison, who had been imprisoned in the Lubyanka at the same time as McCullagh and evidently knew him well. Harrison (1879-1967) was an American who, although technically an Associated Press correspondent in Moscow since 1920, was also effectively a spy for the United States, providing details of the Bolshevik economy to her spymasters and working in Russia on behalf of American prisoners there. A quarter of a century later, she told a journalist friend that McCullagh, was ‘a young newspaperman on the loose who had been pressed into the intelligence services,’ and that, when she mentioned his name in one of her radio despatches to the US, ‘the British Intelligence service picked that up, prevailed on [the most noted liberal paper in England] to send McCullagh credentials and all went well with him.’<sup>135</sup> The story is not at all improbable, given McCullagh’s previous connections, and the paper concerned was almost certainly the London *Daily News*, a newspaper owned by the Cadbury family which had got into trouble with the British authorities for the pro-Bolshevik attitudes of its Moscow correspondent Arthur Ransome. McCullagh would have supplied something of a corrective to Ransome, as his articles, although factually detailed, were shot through with a growing hostility towards Bolshevism which was to find its apogee later in his reports of the show trials of Catholic prelates by the Russian administration.

It has not been possible, for the purposes of this article, to source any of his contributions to the *Daily News*, but those he contributed – often simultaneously – to American newspapers provide evidence both for his opposition to the new Soviet system, for his fascination with some aspects of it, and of his attempts to explain it to an increasingly sceptical Western readers. At times he would have been within feet of both Lenin and Trotsky at public meetings, and some of his articles bespeak a grudging admiration of the latter, always tempered by his antipathy to Trotsky’s anti-religious activities, and on occasion disfigured by an unsavoury tinge of anti-Semitism which would have been common enough among anti-Bolshevik propagandists at the time (and which in McCullagh’s case was relatively mild,

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<sup>132</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, 8 December 1920.

<sup>133</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 21 March 1921.

<sup>134</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1921.

<sup>135</sup> Lee Stopes, “The Lee Side of LA”, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 1937.



though no more excusable because of that).<sup>136</sup> Although he was prepared to accept that the cost of living under the new regime was low, he had nothing but scorn for the armies of communist functionaries (as compared with manual workers) whom he described as quartering themselves in small private households, commandeering resources and generally – in his view – constituting a parasitical manifestation of the new order.

He wrote with almost clinical detail about the condition of Lenin after his stroke: ‘This cruel dictator whose lifeblood was the materialist conception of history, and who seemed like an embodied theory than like a man, is now reduced to the frightful condition of being dead everywhere except in his brain. He has become, therefore, more inhuman than ever. He has no appetite, no muscular strength, no voice.’<sup>137</sup> He correctly identified Stalin as one of a small group of potential successors to Lenin, but observed somewhat inaccurately that Stalin’s election would leave Russia ‘in the grip of a small Jewish oligarchy’ which controlled all the highest posts in the State except that of the President of the Soviet Republic. The latter was a nominally Christian politician named Kalinin, whom McCullagh described, in a momentary detour into Hiberno-English, as a ‘harmless blatherskite’.<sup>138</sup>

At around this time, he had opened a new front, journalistically speaking. Despite his fame, he appears not to have written for any Irish newspaper. With the exception of the *Irish Times*, which would not in any case have appealed to a Tyrone Catholic as a possible outlet for articles, most Irish newspapers of the day were provincial, not to say parochial. His chosen journal – understandable in the light of his strong religious convictions – was *Studies*, edited by the Irish Jesuits in Dublin. At various intervals over the eight years from 1922, he was to contribute a range of articles to this periodical, but the first three were of particular interest, and were the fruit of his travels in the Baltic states in the aftermath of the revolution. Nor were these reports and insights shared with the readers of any other publications to which he would have had ready access in Britain and the United States: they bear all the hallmarks of his political curiosity and his readiness to explore new territory.<sup>139</sup>

He compared the (mostly German) ascendancy caste in the Baltic states with the Irish ascendancy, although, he noted, there were also differences. The Baltic Barons, as he described them, behaved towards their Lettish and Estonian serfs as Carson had behaved in Ireland; and his distaste for Bolshevism was, in this instance at least, modified by the positive influence of that ideology on those inhabitants of the Baltic states who wished to throw off the German yoke. A correspondent of the *London Morning Post*, he observed, ‘says of the Baltic peoples – “Racially, they have not the power of governing themselves.” How often has the same thing been said of the Irish!’<sup>140</sup> He canvassed the opinions of the Estonians on the partition of Ireland, and was assured that they found it ‘neither statesmanship nor commonsense’.<sup>141</sup> There was even the possibility, he concluded, that Ireland and the Baltic states might have cognate functions in a shrinking geo-political world in which Russia might ‘become a predatory, half-barbaric empire’ and Germany might ‘become a danger to its neighbours owing to its commercial superiority and its terrible power of penetration.’ He added hopefully: ‘The Baltic States may form a link instead of a barrier between a Slavonic

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<sup>136</sup> His hostile characterisations of “the Bolshevik Ishmaels” in his book, *The Bolshevik Persecution of Christianity*, p. 11 and 146-7, are fairly typical examples of the casual elision between Bolshevism and Judaism.

<sup>137</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1923.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Francis McCullagh, ‘The Baltic States from an Irish Point of View: The Baltic Barons’, in *Studies* xi (1922, March), pp. 29-44; ‘Esthonia’, in *Studies* xi (1922, March), pp. 186-198; ‘Latvia’, in *Studies* xi (1922, September) pp. 400-408; ‘Lithuania’, in *Studies* xii (1923, March), pp. 7-25.

<sup>140</sup> McCullagh, *Barons*, p. 44.

<sup>141</sup> McCullagh, *Esthonia*, p. 189.

group of nations on one side and a Teutonic group on the other; while Ireland may form a link instead of a barrier between the British group and the American group.<sup>142</sup>

In two later articles he reprised his Russian experiences.<sup>143</sup> Writing about Trotsky's autobiography, he resiled to a degree from his earlier anti-Semitic observations, and linked the history of the Jews in Russia to those of the Irish in their own homeland. His analysis, even though it was penned three quarters of a century ago, is not without its contemporary resonances in an era marked by the resurgence of nationalism within Europe and elsewhere..

‘Never, after this, can any great Power afford the luxury of persecuting a minority as the Irish Catholic was persecuted in his own country during the eighteenth century, as the Jew was persecuted in Russia during the nineteenth century; for such minorities tend infallibly to ally themselves with the revolutionary forces that are now lurking in every State, and to bring with them a violence of hatred and a carelessness of consequences which your cold, theoretical revolutionist sometimes lacks. Earl Balfour used to deplore the addiction of the mere Irish to murder, but I think that England was lucky in having the Irish to oppress, and not the Odessa Jews, whose priests never condemned oath-bound secret societies. No rabbi ever thought worse of a co-religionist who, in imitation of Samson, brought down death on himself as well as on his enemies; and had Irish priests taken a similar view in '98 and at various other periods of crisis in Anglo-Irish relations, many English battleships and arsenals might have gone sky-high.’<sup>144</sup>

Interviewing Trotsky during the revolution, he wrote, was extremely difficult, because he was as hard to find as a leprechaun. The Bolshevik leader, he noted (with quotations to prove his point) had a real hatred of war – but, as War Commissar, was so often at the front that he was undermined by his comrades in Moscow, not least by Stalin, ‘a stolid young man, slow, dull, and inclined to be lazy, but with a powerful will which enabled him to be industrious.’<sup>145</sup> He writes with much warmth of Trotsky's personal frugality and idealism, reserving, as ever, his strongest condemnation for Trotsky's involvement in the anti-religious movement.

Writing a little later in *Studies* about Peter the Great and Lenin, he argued that both leaders forced on Russia a system which ninety per cent of the Russian people did not want; that both were regarded by their religious opponents as Anti-Christ; and that both drew their inspiration from, and were supported by, foreigners (including, in the case of Peter the Great, Peter de Lacy from Limerick, later governer of Riga). On the other hand, Peter at least was a Christian, whereas Lenin, although not as anti-religious as Trotsky, based his religious policy towards the Orthodox Church on his fear of a wave of religious fanaticism. And McCullagh pointed up one other, striking difference:

‘Though Lenin liked to pose as a man of the people, and to be photographed with a tweed cap on his head, a handkerchief knotted around his neck, and a row of smoking factory chimneys in the background he was less of a manual worker than Peter. In fact he was not a manual worker at all, whereas Peter's feats with hatchet and hammer, and the length of time per day that he sometimes devoted to genuine, productive manual work, would (if he were alive today) have ensured his indignant expulsion from any Trades Union in Ireland or Great Britain.’<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> McCullagh, *Lithuania*, p. 25.

<sup>143</sup> McCullagh, Francis, ‘Leon Trotsky’, *Studies* (1930) (XIX) (September, pp. 425-438; McCullagh, Francis, ‘Peter The Great and Lenin’, *Studies* (1930) (XIX) (December) pp. 564-576.

<sup>144</sup> McCullagh, *Trotsky*, p. 427.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431

<sup>146</sup> McCullagh, *Lenin*, p. 573.

There is more than a hint of grudging admiration in McCullagh's verdict that Lenin's boldest, and most successful tactic was to split from the *mensheviks* in 1903. 'Lenin believed that a small, disciplined party was preferable to a large, undisciplined party, and that a tepid member would only lower the revolutionary temperature. He therefore expelled tepid members without compunction, exactly as Saint Ignatius of Loyola expelled tepid novices from his Order; and the result of the October Revolution showed that he was right.'<sup>147</sup>

However, what increasingly attracted his attention – and his indignation rather than admiration – was the series of show trials of Catholic prelates mounted by the authorities, and their related efforts to set up a branch of the Orthodox church which would be amenable to the Moscow regime. The show trials were in particular directed against priests and bishops ministering to Polish exiles in Russia, notably in Petrograd. In common usage in Russian, he observed, the word 'Polish' and 'Catholic' were the same – the Poles' combination of religion and nationalism marked them out as potentially subversive, and some of them had not been slow to attack Bolshevism in sermons and articles. McCullagh was able to obtain access to one of the most controversial of these trials (one of the six defendants, the vicar-general of the Catholic Archdiocese of Petrograd, Mgr. Budkiewicz, was eventually executed, and another, Archbishop Cieplak of Vilna, had his death sentence commuted to life imprisonment, and was finally allowed to leave for the United States) by virtue of his fluent command of Russian and his deliberately sub-fusc clothing, which enabled him to pass unnoticed among the crowds: anyone identified as a foreign newspaperman would have been banned. As a later admirer and interviewer wrote of his ability to blend into any background:

'One can visualise his crinkling, whimsical smile, his twinkly blue eyes, his shabby clothes, following war campaigns in his characteristic big boots with two pairs of heavy, Kerry-knitted socks inside them; consorting with the men of forests and mines; sitting at back street cafes and mountain inns in any part of the world, getting inside the skin and behind the mind of the populace; then changing into his best suit and patent leather shoes to call at an embassy or dine with a government minister.'<sup>148</sup>

His success in attending the trial, he discovered shortly afterwards, was only partial. Eight of the ten cables he had sent back to his newspaper, although written 'in a tone of extreme moderation' to appease the censors, were suppressed by the Russian censorship, and carbon copies of all these articles, which he had sent to London through two foreign relief missions, never arrived.<sup>149</sup> A few weeks after the trial had concluded, he was told that his permit to reside in Russia had expired and would not be renewed, and was summoned to the Lubyanka where an official named Roller, the head of the Anglo-American section of the OGPU, showed him a fat dossier on his activities and accused him of being a British military spy.<sup>150</sup> Conscious of the fact that his expulsion might only be a matter of weeks or even days, McCullagh exited Russia via Warsaw, from which city he cabled a number of despatches detailing the conduct of the trials in febrile language which undoubtedly mirrored his own sentiments. 'No Christian martyrs', he declared in one despatch, "ever bore themselves more nobly before the tribunal of Nero".<sup>151</sup> The extent to which his despatches aroused public interest and, in certain circles, indignation, may be gauged from the fact that they were directly responsible for the refusal of a visa for a projected trip to the United States by Madam Kalinin, the wife of the Russian president, in 1923.<sup>152</sup> The international uproar created by the trials was also responsible for the commutation of Cieplak's death sentence and his eventual exile.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 575.

<sup>148</sup> Gaffney, *Francis McCullagh*, p. 26.

<sup>149</sup> Francis McCullagh, Francis, *The Bolshevik Persecution of Christianity* (London, 1924), p. 277.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 277-8.

<sup>151</sup> *The Daily Counsellor*, 13 April 1923.

<sup>152</sup> *The Washington Post*, 11 April 1923.

His more considered, but no less passionate verdict on these proceedings was delivered in a book published very shortly afterwards,<sup>153</sup> which not only recounted the trials in some detail but explored some of the geo-political aspects of Soviet policy, and went to some lengths to defend the Vatican against the charge (levelled against it by Orthodox *emigrés*) that it had been prepared to do a deal with the Kremlin in exchange for favourable treatment for Catholics in Soviet Russia. His book is notable for several things, not least its pen pictures, not only of the accused, but of their accusers. He took pains to give details of the charges as well as the defence, and his description of the atmosphere in which the trial was held is redolent of the heightened emotions on both sides. The fashionable anti-semitism so commonly associated with anti-Bolshevism at that time, however, makes a particularly objectionable appearance, as in a passage in which he claims to identify, on the basis of physiognomy alone, ‘many Hebrew faces’.

‘While the procurator was demanding six lives, a Jewess walked slowly down the hall from one of the front seats. She was a particularly repulsive-looking elderly woman in a low-necked white dress, and, as she swept past, she nodded and winked at friends on each side of her, who nodded pleasantly in return. About the same time two Polish women, overcome by the ferocious bellowing of Krylenko [the prosecutor], left the court in tears....A good many of the women present were Reds; one could see that not only by their attitude towards the prisoners, but also by their short hair and their rich dresses.....at the terrible end of the trial, when one could almost hear the Angel of Death beating his wings in that hushed and crowded court, they scrutinised the faces of the condemned men through their opera glasses as hungrily and insistently as they would have scrutinised the faces of great actors on the stage.’<sup>154</sup>

McCullagh’s analysis of the reasons for the vigour with which these trials were being prosecuted was more moderate in its tone than these descriptive passages. He put it down, effectively, to a power-struggle within Bolshevism, and to the need, as perceived by the Bolshevik leaders, to maintain the loyalty of their own followers in the context of the “outbursts of revolutionary fury which take place among their extremists.”<sup>155</sup> He even had some advice to offer – but it was advice informed by his evident belief that such advice neither would nor could be taken.

‘Why do not the Bolshevik leaders cease their furious and exhausting effort to keep their temperature which certainly cannot be maintained for long, and which has already gone down many degrees during the last six months? Why do not they seek support instead among the great number of moderate, non-party men whom I met in Russia, and whose horror of revolution is so great, after what they have suffered during the last five years, that they would support even the Soviet government against the social revolutionaries and the monarchists or any of its other enemies, if only the Bolsheviks showed the least traces of moderation and common sense? Well, the answer is that the Bolsheviks profoundly distrust every party in Russia, save their own; they feel that if once they lost the support of their Reds they would themselves be lost.’<sup>156</sup>

One of his most thoughtful observations about the Russian revolution, in the preface to his account of his experiences as a *soi-disant* foreign correspondent in 1919-20, was that Russian communism was “‘like a top kept spinning by external propulsion. Once the external action ceases, the top will fall.’<sup>157</sup> Ironically, the years immediately following his departure from

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<sup>153</sup> McCullagh, Francis (1924) *The Bolshevik Persecution of Christianity*. London: John Murray.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 10-11.

<sup>157</sup> McCullagh, *Reds*, p. ix.

Russia were to see McCullagh himself applying as much external propulsion as possible, most notably in condemnation of the Bolshevik attitude to Christianity, which he now set himself to denounce in any and every possible forum, capitalising on the celebrity which his extraordinary and widely-read articles had secured for him, particularly in the United States.

‘Writer Who Faced Death in Russia, Now Safe, Will Tell of Conditions There’, the *Washington Post* excitedly informed its readers.<sup>158</sup> ‘Only by dashing across the border under an assumed name at a time when border officials were busy celebrating the religious festivals’, the newspaper added, ‘did McCullagh escape the dragnet of the Cheka, the bolshevik secret service organisation, which had issued orders to stop McCullagh and take him prisoner.’ An upstate New York newspaper described him as ‘a modest little Irishman, who probably knows more about Russia from the inside than any other living authority.’<sup>159</sup> The *New York Times*, reporting his arrival from Europe on the liner ‘Saxonia’ on 5 November 1924, quoted his view that the Russian jails were full of socialists, and his prediction that, although the Soviet system would remain in power for another decade, that country would eventually return to a monarchical system of government.<sup>160</sup>

More significantly, and unguardedly, he publicly endorsed the authenticity – as he saw it – of the infamous “Zinoviev letter,” a document concocted by the British secret service which helped to bring down the first British Labour Government in 1924 because of its supposed instructions from Moscow to British Communists to increase agitation in the United Kingdom, especially in the armed forces. In McCullagh’s view, one surprising effect of the publication of this letter had been to detach Irish voters in Britain from their former allegiance to Labour and, rather than waste their votes by supporting the Liberal party, to give them to the Tories, the party that had been the traditional enemy of Irish nationalism. ‘The Irish in England’, he observed, ‘are a devout people, who know something of what the Bolsheviks have done to religion. So that when the definite connection between Moscow and some of the Labour leaders was revealed they left that party.’<sup>161</sup>

The charitable explanation for this rush to judgment, is that the British Tories’ support for the recent Irish settlement and the significance of the Irish vote in the British general election distorted his perspective. Only a few years later, he was warning the readers of *Studies* about the dangers of British propaganda about Russia, and specifically about the allegation by the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir George Buchanan, that Lenin and Trotsky were in the pay of the Kaiser. ‘The result of the allied onslaught on Trotsky and Lenin’, he observed ironically, ‘is still to be found in many quiet English homes, and even perhaps in some Irish ones, where it is firmly believed that Trotsky indulged in nightly orgies in the Kremlin and that Lenin was a Jew.’<sup>162</sup>

McCullagh was now a figure of considerable international stature, and was lionised as such on his arrival in the United States. Newspaper reports early in 1925 recounted how he addressed an audience of more than 3,500 in Boston in January,<sup>163</sup> and, in the same month, he shared a platform at a Foreign Policy Association lunch in New York with Dr. Moissaye Olgin, the American correspondent of *Izvestia*, at which both speakers evoked hostile reactions from the audience. McCullagh, in unusually inflammatory terms, denounced the Soviet rulers as ‘butchers’ and argued that a meeting such as the one he was speaking at could

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<sup>158</sup> 29 August, 1923.

<sup>159</sup> *Olean Evening Herald*, 14 November 1924.

<sup>160</sup> *New York Times*, 6 November 1924.

<sup>161</sup> *Olean Evening Herald*, 14 November 1924.

<sup>162</sup> McCullagh, *Trotsky*, p. 435.

<sup>163</sup> *Washington Post*, 18 January 1925

not have been organised in Russia.<sup>164</sup> Olgin replied, in somewhat more measured tones, that McCullagh's rhetoric had been unworthy of his audience.

With plaudits – and criticisms – ringing in his ears, McCullagh eventually terminated his engagement with the US lecture circuit, which he found exhausting and less rewarding than journalism. “It nearly killed me”, he remarked graphically.<sup>165</sup> He spent much of 1924 and 1925 touring the world with the American fleet, a period which kindled an interest in Latin America at a time when this part of the world excited only episodic interest among American journalists, and usually only when US military or commercial interests were involved. Now turned his attention to Latin America, which in this era. The chronology of his travels in this period is somewhat confusing, since an obscure website<sup>166</sup> records him as having interviewed the president of State of Amazonas in Manaus in April 1924. He appears to have written little for US newspapers during this period, but in June 1925 he filed an unusual – for him – report on shark-fishing in Yucatan, in the gulf of Mexico.<sup>167</sup>

He also took advantage of hospitality offered by the US Navy to travel with them across the Pacific to New Zealand, where his brother worked for a mining company, and where – in Wellington – he was accorded a substantial welcome by that city's Irish population.

By early the following year, he was back in Latin America, and was reported as having arrived in Belo Horizonte, in Central Brazil, after a “long tour through Goyaz and western Brazil”.<sup>168</sup> His observations on his travels were, as it happens, still newsworthy, although not this time for political reasons. The French Dominicans, he told one newspaper correspondent who interviewed him as the celebrity he undoubtedly was, were doing magnificent work among the natives of the region, but there were some difficulties.

Friar Constant, who was abbot there, told me last month that he had to put his foot down and insist on the native girls and women wearing something, at least, when they took it into their heads to visit the Catholic missions, for up to the present they have been in the habit of wearing absolutely nothing save perhaps a rosary around their necks and a flower behind the left ear. The abbot does not object to this light attire on ordinary occasions, but he firmly insists that for church parades it is insufficient. Happily, the new order is being observed, greatly to the satisfaction of the good Dominicans, who see that a forward step has been successfully taken, though it must be admitted that the extreme exiguity of the costumes worn would probably cause consternation even among the most advanced *decolletées* of Paris and Rome.”<sup>169</sup>

Two letters in the Notre Dame archives give some clues to his whereabouts. One of them, dated July 7 but without any year stated, offered the editor of the *Ave Maria* magazine an article about a road which the Franciscans were then building across the Andes, and disclosed his intention of leaving overland for Peru on that day. The second, from Lima, is dated 21 September 1926, and notes that his journey to the Peruvian capital had been ‘twice as long and a hundred times as difficult as I expected.’<sup>170</sup> The Lima letter enclosed a lengthy article he had contributed to *El Comercio*, a newspaper he described as ‘one which is sometimes

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<sup>164</sup> *New York Times*, 18 January 1925.

<sup>165</sup> *New York Times*, 17 March 1926.

<sup>166</sup> [www.sikhglobalvillage.com/downloads/pdf/The%20Sikh%20Global%20Village%20Brazil.pdf](http://www.sikhglobalvillage.com/downloads/pdf/The%20Sikh%20Global%20Village%20Brazil.pdf). Visited 30 November 2006.

<sup>167</sup> *New York Times*, 28 June 1925.

<sup>168</sup> *New York Times*, 17 March 1926.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Francis McCullagh to Fr. Daniel Hudson, University of Notre Dame Archives: Hudson papers (X-4-j).

inclined to dally with Bolshevism and regard it as progress', adding, with no little sense of self-importance: 'I am going to put all the South American newspapers right in the same way, for I don't want South America to go the same way as Mexico.'<sup>171</sup>

The same letter announced his intention of going to Chile and Argentina, but his evidently burgeoning interest in Mexico had not escaped the attention of significant Catholic circles in the United States. The conjunction of their interests, and his, were to lead to his next major expedition, and one that was to embroil him in even deeper controversy than ever before.

One person who had followed his various exploits with mounting interest was Wilfrid Parsons SJ, editor of the New York-based Jesuit magazine *America*. Parsons was much exercised – like many of his American co-religionists – by the ongoing struggles in Mexico between the left-wing government of President Calles, and various forces opposed to that revolution, including many Catholics. Nor were American Catholics alone in these concerns. Many Americans, including policy-makers, had long been apprehensive about Mexico, although rarely because of the Mexican government's hostile attitude to the Catholic Church. Calles's predecessor, Alvaro Obregón, had been the first head of any American state to diplomatically recognise the Soviet Union, and the radically secularist 1917 Mexican Constitution had enhanced an anti-clericalism which was at least as deeply rooted in Mexican history as the piety of its millions of Catholics.<sup>172</sup> Tensions increased, leading to anti-government uprisings in various parts of the country by the end of 1926, the year in which Calles began stringent enforcement of the Constitution's anti-clerical provisions. The rebels, fighting under the banner of "Christ the King", included priests and generals, and numbered at their peak some 12,000. It was a struggle in which neither side distinguished itself by its tactics. "The battle", one scholar has noted, "was waged with all the brutality characteristic of religious and civil wars."<sup>173</sup>

Pressure by US Catholics on their own administration mounted. This was the context in which Fr. Parsons got a letter from McCullagh, who had by now returned to London from South America, offering him articles about Britain. Parsons made a counter-offer to persuade him to go to Mexico and to report for *America* from there. McCullagh replied, with the insouciance of the free-lance correspondent, that "he would come immediately if he got enough money."<sup>174</sup> Parsons then approached the Knights of Columbus, the well-known American association of lay Catholics who had already, at their 1926 conference, fulminated against the misdeeds of the Calles government. The Knights readily came up with a substantial commitment of funds – which was, as shall be seen later, to lead to further complications – and within two days McCullagh was on the liner 'Mauretania' on his way back across the Atlantic. He adopted the most extraordinary itinerary, travelling up the Amazon (via canoe in its upper reaches) and then overland, to enter Mexico from the south rather than across its border with the United States. "Later", Parsons wrote, "he managed to enter Mexico, disguising himself as a farmer interested in cultivating tomatoes for the winter – although I must say that he did not need the disguise very much after his journeys through the Amazon and through the jungles of Paraguay and Bolivia."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Francis McCullagh, 'La Actualidad Rusa' in *El Comercio*, Lima, 20 Septiembre de 1926.

<sup>172</sup> James J. Horn, 'U.S. Diplomacy and "The Specter of Bolshevism" in Mexico (1924-1927)', in *The Americas*, 32, (1) (1975, July), pp. 31-45.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>174</sup> Wilfrid Parsons, *Mártires mexicanos. Relatos sobre la persecución religiosa en México*, <http://www.universidadabierta.edu.mx/Biblio/P/Parsons%20Wilfrid-Martires.htm> (accessed 10 April 2007).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

McCullagh embarked on this new crusade with his customary *brio* and disregard for his personal safety. Now reasonably fluent in Spanish, he maintained his disguise throughout the months in 1927 when he was inside Mexico, and did not risk disclosing his identity by writing for American or other publications until after he had left – a reasonable precaution, in the circumstances. As it happened, and for various reasons, fewer publications of international stature were now in the market for his reports. One reason was undoubtedly the complex nature of the Mexican struggle, and the divided opinions within US elites about the rights and wrongs of the situation. Another, possibly, was his sponsorship by the Knights of Columbus, although the arrangement which McCullagh had made with them was – no doubt in order to safeguard his journalistic integrity – one by virtue of which he accepted their financial support but guaranteed to repay the organisation out of the proceeds of the sale of his articles on his return. His greatest success was with the *Wall Street Journal*, no doubt the US newspaper most likely to endorse his increasingly frenetic warnings about the danger to the United States from its left-wing southern neighbour. This paper published a major series of articles by him in early 1928.<sup>176</sup> A number of other US regional newspapers evidently also syndicated these articles but, that apart, the only other fruits of his labours were a number of pamphlets published by the Knights of St. Columbus and by other Catholic organisations<sup>177</sup> and, most controversially of all, a book-length account of his investigation which evoked a torrent of criticism.<sup>178</sup>

Even before his book was published, however, McCullagh became involved in a bitter disagreement with his sponsors, not about the content of his articles, but about the terms upon which he had carried out the work.<sup>179</sup> His articles were being distributed by the McClure press agency, and the whole enterprise involved a man called John Stuart who seems to have acted as some sort of agent. Initially it worked to everyone's satisfaction, but McCullagh then became convinced that Stuart had sought and received money from the Jesuits for himself on the pretext that it was for McCullagh. Extremely offended by what he interpreted as a slight on his professionalism, he wrote to Stuart:

'I accepted your offer to go into Mexico because I looked on you as a newspaper agent who would pay my expenses and afterwards recoup himself from the payment made for my articles. This was an absolutely legitimate business proposition, and I accepted \$1,600 to cover the whole journey from the day I left London until the day I returned. I still have about \$400, which is quite ample. I desire to receive no money from you on my account, and no

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<sup>176</sup> Francis McCullagh, 'Calles' Government likened to Soviet: Communistic Policies Called menace to Peace of America, Ultimate Ruin Seen' (5 January 1928); 'Mexican Land Law Works Wide Injury: Administration a Record of Despoliation and Graft with American farmer Worst Sufferer' (6 January 1928); 'Mexican Policies Drive Natives Out Failure of the Calles Agrarian law Proved as Thousands of Own people Flee to US' (7 January 1928); 'Stamp of Calles Put on Education: Administration called Blight on Child Training and Religious Liberty – Charities Looted' (9 January 1928); 'Calles Terrorizes Political Victims: Opponents of Policies Buried in Subterranean Dungeons Like Moscow's Famous Lubryanka' (11 January 1928); 'Oppression marks Mexican "Justice": Crushing of Political Foes by Ruthless Tactics is Shown in Series of Incidents' (28 January 1928): all articles from *Wall Street Journal* on dates noted.

<sup>177</sup> McCullagh, Francis (1926), *Mexico: Bolshevism the Menace*, New Haven, Conn. Knights of Columbus Supreme Council; (1926), *Red Mexico: The Facts*, New Haven, Conn. Knights of Columbus Supreme Council; (1927), *The Iron Hand in Mexico*, Commonweal Pamphlets, No. 5. Reprinted from *The Commonweal* (November 16, 1927, and November 23, 1927); 1928, *The Mexican Gang and Mexican Headquarters*. Union City, New Jersey: The Sign Press.

<sup>178</sup> Francis McCullagh, *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America*, (New York, Montreal and London, 1928).

<sup>179</sup> *America* magazine archives, Georgetown University Library: special collections. Box: 19 Fold: 2 Mexico Material – McCullagh/Stuart Affair (1927), from which subsequent references to this controversy are drawn.



payment of any kind except from McClure after he has settled up with me and deducted \$1,600 for expenses.<sup>180</sup>

The end of the affair appears to have left a bad taste in everyone's mouths. McCullagh refunded some money he felt he had been paid unnecessarily as a result of Stuart's misrepresentations of his position to the Jesuits, and the Jesuits attempted, somewhat unsuccessfully, to keep the peace between the warring parties. The documentary evidence supports McCullagh's version of events, but plainly even his Jesuit friends had come to think of him as somewhat difficult to deal with.

McCullagh later voiced his frustrations at the difficulty he experienced in getting his articles published in the United States. As he informed readers of *Studies* the following year:

'In 1927 I visited Mexico for the second time [the first was a brief visit in 1924] and in New York, on my way back, I told the editors of all the leading papers there that there would soon be civil war in Mexico. Many of them agreed with me, but their millionaire owners refused to let them take my articles. The motives of those owners I can only guess at.'<sup>181</sup>

He was not slow in providing material to aid his readers in their conjectures about the possible motives of US newspaper proprietors. As he had now been a world-renowned journalist for a quarter of a century, his charge that newspaper proprietors had agendas of their own seems to have been a belated discovery, but his earlier celebrity, and the eagerness with world newspapers had printed so many of his despatches from Russia, the Balkans and elsewhere may have generated over-optimism on his part. The owners of great newspapers, he informed the readers of *Studies* ruefully in 1929, 'who are often millionaires but seldom journalists, exercise a strict censorship over the news columns, not because they love peace and quietness but because they love money, political power, social consideration, the favour of governments, and the esteem of great bankers.'<sup>182</sup> This was a theme to which he returned later in a review of a biography of William Randolph Hearst in which he neatly skewered the *erzatz* populism of the US media magnate.

'In his anxiety to gain over the manual workers, the large masses of foreigners in the great cities, and the poor generally, Hearst sometimes went near to Bolshevism, for he advocated the nationalisation of railways, coal-mines and other public utilities (. . .) Hearst was very far, however, from Bolshevism, and I do not think there is ever any chance of a millionaire newspaper owner placing in the saddle people who will immediately confiscate all his properties.'<sup>183</sup>

One of the most telling sections in his book is his detailed and well-documented critique of the inadequate approach of major newspapers in the United States and in Britain (not excluding *The Times*) to the Mexican conflict, and it is probable that it was this section of the work which offended many of his professional colleagues at least as much as, if not more than, the gory and overblown rhetoric of the rest of the book.<sup>184</sup> To this can, presumably, be added the unmistakable tension between an Irish Catholic journalist and the WASP establishment of the eastern United States. This is partly reflected in his succinct summary of the political economy of the major media of the day, which to an extent speaks for itself.

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid. Francis McCullagh to John Stuart, 8 August 1928.

<sup>181</sup> McCullagh, Francis, 'Mexico and The Press', in *Studies*, xviii, (1929, June), pp. 225-239: p. 225.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>183</sup> McCullagh, Francis 'A Pioneer of Newspaper Combines', in *Studies*, Vol. xix (1930, March), pp. 125-130: p. 130.

<sup>184</sup> McCullagh, *Red Mexico*, pp. 382-395.

‘Before an editor attacks any abuse, he asks himself quite a number of questions, to wit (1) if his owner – I mean the proprietor of his newspaper – is involved in the abuse, (2) if any of his big advertisers are involved, (3) if the political party which his newspaper supports is involved, (4) if the Foreign Office or other Government Department would be offended and cease supplying further information, (5) if any wealthy religious body would be offended. It does not matter, of course, if a poor and numerically unimportant Church takes offence. In short, the loud declaration of the gigantic modern newspaper that it is always on the side of the oppressed, always the champion of the bottom dog, is . . . false.’<sup>185</sup>

There is evidence that not only his articles, but also his book, became embroiled in the US Presidential election of 1928, in which Alfred Smith, a Catholic, was the Democratic Party’s candidate. His book was not published until after the election and when, in December 1928, it finally reached the bookstores, his American publishers revealed that publication had had to be postponed five times because Catholics associated with Smith’s campaign feared that it would raise the religious issue during the presidential election. The publishers added that

‘The Democratic National Committee had the matter considered by the Special Committee acting in an advisory capacity on matters relating to the religious issue which became so prominent in the presidential campaign. This Committee requested that publication be deferred until after the election, and in the best interests of both candidates, work on the book was suspended, all proof copies were called in, and particular care was taken that no proofs should be allowed to reach campaign workers on either side.’<sup>186</sup>

The Catholic Book Club was, as might be imagined, more divided on the issue: its Board of Editors initially split five to two in favour of making it “Book of the Month”, but the two who had been out-voted managed to have the recommendation downgraded to a strong recommendation that the book be read by all the club’s members.

The book contained a cautious foreword by the publishers themselves, effectively a health warning. Some publishing houses, they noted, might ‘hesitate to launch Captain McCullagh’s forceful opinions to the public.’ At the same time, they vouched for his honesty, integrity, and professional competence, and expressed the hope that the publication of the book would, not least because of the importance of Mexico to the US, lead to a national debate. ‘Perhaps the unmistakable conviction with which Captain McCullagh presents his case may draw forth an equally forceful reply, entailing the public discussion that Captain McCullagh so ardently desires for Mexican affairs.’<sup>187</sup>

To describe “Red Mexico” as one-sided would be a serious understatement. It is highly-coloured prose devoted to detailed accounts of atrocities committed by only one side in the Mexican civil war, illustrated by dramatic photographs taken (and subsequently suppressed) by the Mexican authorities themselves, and informed by two central theses: that the Mexican persecution of the Catholic Church had its links in Bolshevik-inspired communism, and that US policy towards Mexico was a major factor in encouraging the Mexican authorities in these policies. Although McCullagh’s accounts of the extra-judicial murders which characterised the Mexican government’s campaign against the rebels are embellished by emotive language, they cannot be simply discounted, and many of his reports carry the ring of truth. However, his unquestioning acceptance of the moral basis for the rebellion led him to ignore, and in all probability suppress, incidents and tactics reflecting adversely on the rebels that a more balanced reportage would have included; his knowledge of US foreign policy was very limited; and he was evidently unaware of the strong anti-Mexican views to be found in the US

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 395-396

<sup>186</sup> *New York World*, 15 December 1928.

<sup>187</sup> *Red Mexico*, p. 14.

State Department at that time, preferring to advance a type of conspiracy theory based largely on circumstantial evidence.<sup>188</sup>

Even before his book appeared, the tone of the syndicated articles on which it was based had come in for criticism. McCullagh had attempted to disarm this response with a pre-emptive strike, in an article in the *National Review*, against the failure – as he saw it – of the US newspapers to engage properly with what was happening south of the Rio Grande. This article provoked a patrician rebuke by the *New York Times*, which described his charges as ‘silly’ and ‘absurd’.<sup>189</sup> McCullagh’s characteristically energetic response combined irony and a certain gritty realism.

‘Surely you under-estimate the excellence of your foreign service, the ability and daring of your correspondents when you ask us to believe that the trouble is partly due to one bad man in the Mexican cable office who draws a thick red line through most of your correspondent’s cables. The achievements of your representatives during the great war, during the Sinn Fein struggle, and recently in China, Russia and other parts of the Old World all speak for themselves. Your reporters have unveiled for us the distant and mysterious city of Lassa [Lhasa, in Tibet], yet you ask us to believe that they cannot unveil the City of Mexico, which is so near that it can be called up in a few moments on the telephone and reached in a few days by rail.’<sup>190</sup>

The credibility of his book was questioned almost immediately on its publication. *The Nation* described it as ‘sizzling interventionist propaganda, vintage of over a decade ago, acidified in the interval’, and made much play of the fact that it included what purported to be a photograph of the corpse of the former President of Mexico, Adolfo de la Huerta, despite the fact that, at the time the book was published, and indeed for long afterwards, de la Huerta was very much alive.<sup>191</sup> James J. Horn described it four decades later as ‘unscholarly’, which was perhaps an inverted compliment, and, more accurately, as ‘a masterpiece of intemperance’.<sup>192</sup> There were similarly hostile critiques in the newspaper which had published so much of McCullagh’s work in the past, the *New York Times*,<sup>193</sup> and, at around the same time, in the *New York Evening Post*.<sup>194</sup>

Back in Ireland, his work received a warmer welcome. He addressed a crowded meeting in the Royal Dublin Society on the iniquities of the Calles regime in 1928. Shortly afterwards, a Fine Gael senator named Toal, subsequently moved the following resolution in Seanad Eireann: ‘That the Seanad desires to place on record its strong condemnation of the atrocities being committed by the Mexican Government on Catholic priests and people for attempting to worship their God according to the doctrine of their Church; and to take such steps as it may consider best to put a stop to the wholesale slaughter of Christian people.’ The resolution was agreed after a debate in which one of the supporters of the resolution, Senator McKean, argued that McCullagh’s condemnation of the Calles regime was important because he had ‘gained international fame as a newspaper correspondent.’<sup>195</sup> As there were no ‘steps’ that the Seanad could conceivably take to oppose Calles, the last phrase in the resolution was, by agreement, dropped.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Horn, James J., *U.S. Diplomacy*.

<sup>189</sup> *New York Times*, 22 October 1927

<sup>190</sup> Francis McCullagh, ‘How to Find Out the Truth about Mexico’, *New York Times*, 22 November 1927.

<sup>191</sup> Ernest Gruening, ‘Red Rubbish’, in *The Nation*, 128 (3316), 23 January 1929, pp. 110-111.

<sup>192</sup> James J. Horn, *U.S. Diplomacy*, p. 35.

<sup>193</sup> *New York Times*, 20 January 1929.

<sup>194</sup> Anita Brenner, “Mexico Painted in a Lurid Red by McCullagh”, *New York Evening Post*, 2 February 1929.

<sup>195</sup> Seanad Eireann, Debates, Vol. 10, Col. 400, 28 April 1928.

By the time these reviews appeared McCullagh, probably more than a little disenchanted with American journalism, had moved to Paris, where he now occupied a very fashionable and no doubt expensive apartment at 5, Place Vendôme. From there, he attempted, with scant success, to marshal his supporters to combat the hostile reviews of his book. The offending photograph, he pointed out in one letter to an ally, had been inserted by his US publishers without his knowledge or consent, and the misleading caption (the corpse was that of de la Huerta's brother) had also been supplied by them. In one lengthy letter, despatched probably without much hope of publication to the editor of the *New York Evening Post* on St. Patrick's Day 1929, he penned a lengthy justification for what he accepted was the "undignified" rhetoric in his book and, perhaps with a certain *esprit de l'escalier*, set out to defend himself against the charges made by the reviewer, and in particular the accusation that he desired for Mexico a Catholic theocracy

'I do not believe that, outside the Vatican City, the Church should rule anywhere save in the spiritual sphere. I do not believe that Archbishops and Bishops should constitute the civil government of Mexico ... Miss Brenner's review gives the impression that I favour an ecclesiastical dictatorship in Mexico. On the contrary I favour the separation of Church and State in Mexico, and would dislike to see the Church interfering in politics or the State interfering in religious matters. Nor do I hold any brief for the great white *hacendados*. Most of them have sunk beneath contempt ... With such people I have no sympathy. My sympathies are all with the *insurrectos* on the hills, with the people who form the backbone of the country, with the faithful clergy who remain in the country at the peril of their lives – and the great majority of these people are dusky of complexion.<sup>196</sup>

Now in his middle fifties, McCullagh in Paris was moving slowly but not without dignity into a sort of journalistic backwater. A reflective article he wrote for *Studies* at that time disclosed that he was studying, at the University of Paris, "an eastern language which may be useful to me in the near future and which I do not want to forget."<sup>197</sup> He made what must have been one of his rare visits to his native country in 1928, when he lectured to enthusiastic audiences on the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico. He came to Ireland again in 1933 for a holiday, when he was interviewed at length by the intrepid Gertrude Gaffney, an *Irish Independent* journalist whose editor, Frank Geary, had afforded her the kind of roving brief (including the right to contribute articles on foreign and domestic politics) rarely accorded in that era even to her male counterparts. It was undoubtedly this meeting which led to the flattering profile of McCullagh which Gaffney contributed to the 1935 issue of *The Capuchin Annual*, and in which he confided that his main journalistic interests for the future involved a return to Russia and Japan, the scene of his earliest journalistic triumphs.

However, neither Russia nor Japan were to see him again. What intervened was Spain and, specifically, the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in the summer of 1936. Given his track record, it is hardly surprising that McCullagh went to Spain almost as soon as Franco's forces launched their offensive, but this time he went on different terms and, initially, entirely at his own expense. 'I had no big paper behind me at any time, and no paper at all at first. Finally I succeeded in securing the representation of a number of small newspapers situated in places as far apart as Melbourne and Cape Town.'<sup>198</sup>

His modesty in naming any of these "small newspapers" was presumably in part tactical. Some of them were denominational – like the *Catholic Herald*, in London. Interestingly, they

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<sup>196</sup> Francis McCullagh to editor, *New York Post*, 17 March 1929 (MS carbon copy), *America Magazine* archives, (Box:19 Fold: 1 Mexico Material – Capt. Francis McCullagh – Correspondence 1927-1931).

<sup>197</sup> Francis McCullagh, Francis 'Notes on Linguistic Studies in Parisin *Studies*, xviii (1929, March), ", pp. 111-123: p. 112.

<sup>198</sup> Francis McCullagh, Francis (1937), *In Franco's Spain*. London: 1937), p. 13.

also included the *Irish Independent*: in all probability this particular connection was as a result of his encounter with Gertrude Gaffney of that newspaper the previous year. Neither of these titles, had he identified them, would have particularly enhanced the credibility of his book on Spain for a general public. The only major newspaper for which he wrote from Spain appears to have been the London *Daily Mail*.

Significantly, the tone of the book itself provides evidence that the hostile reception that greeted his volume on Mexico had acted to temper his public utterances. While his despatches to outlets like the *Catholic Herald* and the *Irish Independent* allowed full rein to his passionate and literate Catholicism, the book is (despite the fact that he experienced the war briefly, and only from Franco's side) more *nuancé* than the earlier work. He criticised, for instance, the 'arrogant and stupid men' in charge of the Nationalist press bureau, and, although he agreed that his newspaper articles had been described as 'unduly optimistic', his critics 'should remember that only optimistic articles are allowed to leave Salamanca, and that the articles which I consider to be my best were detained without my knowledge by the Censor.'<sup>199</sup>

His trajectory through Nationalist Spain was different from many of his other reporting assignments, not least because of his perennial shortage of money (he lost about £200 on the whole enterprise). This meant that he could not afford the better and more expensive hotels, and live closer to the people. Possibly for this reason, a great deal of his narrative is taken up with the difficulties he experienced travelling from place to place, and securing adequate accommodation, as well as with entertaining accounts of his meetings with other foreign correspondents. But it is a fascinating narrative nonetheless, because it is written from the viewpoint of an experienced observer who is not above the occasional piece of self-deprecation and who had a connoisseur's eye for the inefficiencies and absurdities of top-heavy bureaucracies wherever he saw them. His account of being billeted in a convent where he was sleeping in the nude, and almost appeared in front of some of the good sisters when he was alarmed by disturbances during the night, is the stuff of pure comedy. In the morning, he discovered that the noises he had heard had emanated from some of the involuntary residents of the same institution which, as well as being a convent, was a lunatic asylum.

His initial encounters with the Irish forces serving under O'Duffy did not go well, and it was some time before his journalistic credentials were accepted as a help rather than a hindrance. He found the copious imbibings of the Irish officers distasteful, and some of the officers brutal and uncaring about the men under their command. He noted at one stage that he was the recipient of enough complaints from the ordinary Irish members of O'Duffy's brigade that – had he wanted to – he could have written articles about a thousand scandals. He had one brief interview with O'Duffy, who patently did not impress him: all his praise, effectively, was reserved for the enthusiastic, often ill-educated but patriotic and religiously devout other ranks. Their brief exposure to action was derisory, and four of their seven fatal casualties were killed by fire from their own side – during an attack by Spanish Nationalist soldiers who believed them to be government forces. 'The sore point' about the Irish, McCullagh concluded, 'is that the Germans and the Italians did something to help Franco, whereas the Irish did nothing.'<sup>200</sup>

His anger, as he left Spain, at the discovery that many of his articles had been censored, was exacerbated by the revelation that the censored pieces had been those containing references to the Irish Brigade because, as the censor helpfully but somewhat unrealistically explained, he [i.e. the censor] 'did not wish it to be known abroad that General Franco had foreigners in his army.'<sup>201</sup> What made him even crosser was the fact that Gertrude Gaffney, who had also been

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321

sent out to Spain by her editor, had returned ‘with an attaché case loaded with well-filled notebooks’, on the basis of which she had published a long series of articles about the Brigade in the *Irish Independent*.<sup>202</sup>

On the evidence of his book, the probability is that his articles were censored, not because they revealed the presence of an Irish Brigade in Franco’s forces (which was hardly a secret), but because they provided at least some evidence that all was not well in the Irish camp. Some of the Irish soldiers, he noted, were poorly behaved, as ‘General O’Duffy’s agents in Ireland had not been exacting enough in their choice of recruits.’<sup>203</sup> Some of those who arrived in Portugal to join their comrades jumped off the ship which had brought them and swam ashore, where they got drunk and fought with the local police,<sup>204</sup> and others were unhappy because of ‘the isolation, the intense monotony of trench warfare, ignorance of the language, the difficulty of communicating with Ireland, letters taking an incredibly long time owing to the censorship and other delays. The food was unfamiliar and there was no whiskey, tea or humour’.<sup>205</sup> Even more disturbing, from a propaganda point of view, was that the usefulness of the Irish contribution to Franco’s cause was seriously compromised by its cost, which McCullagh put at £170,000 – a figure which one commentator thought was probably exaggerated, but which, even if inaccurate in point of detail, indicated the scale of the problem.<sup>206</sup>

In September 1936 McCullagh embarked on a private initiative which provided evidence both of the degree to which his religious sensibilities had all but overwhelmed his professional judgment and – more unflatteringly for him – his waning influence on the course of the events he was describing. He sent an impassioned cable to Bishop Mageean of Down and Connor in the belief that this prelate could exercise some influence on the Irish government’s attitude to Franco, or, at the very least, on the Irish newspapers. ‘Judging by Irish newspapers ERIN is towed like a dead fish in the wake of puissant, seductive, experienced Sassenach propaganda, and the same thing happening in America where Jewish Freemason influence in Press exercising extraordinary power.’<sup>207</sup> Mageean, impressed, forwarded the cable to de Valera with a covering note suggesting that McCullagh’s opinion was ‘valuable’. De Valera, however, appears to have maintained a diplomatic silence in response, and the hierarchy as a whole, as McGarry points out, ‘appears to have considered the suppression of Communism in Ireland a more important objective than the recognition of Franco.’<sup>208</sup>

Undaunted, McCullagh now decided to make public what he had earlier done in private and, in October 1936, had at least the satisfaction of securing a huge spread in the *Irish Independent* for an open letter directly addressed to de Valera. It was the main article on that paper’s foreign news page, and amounted to the most extraordinary *cri de coeur* ever uttered by an Irish journalist, or ever printed by an Irish newspaper. This took the form of an open letter to President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, which was published in its entirety in the newspaper<sup>209</sup> and, as a chapter in its own right, in his subsequent book.<sup>210</sup> He appealed to de Valera to take sides in favour of ‘the poor, the simple, the wise, the educated Catholics, the cream of the generous youth of Spain’ and against ‘the priest-hunter, the degenerate (...) the jailbird, the cut-throat, the murderer, the shady financier, the corrupt

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>205</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, (Cork, 1999), p. 43.

<sup>206</sup> R.A. Stradling, ‘Battleground of Reputations: Ireland and the Spanish Civil War’, pp. 107-132 in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie (eds.), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, (Edinburgh, 1996).

<sup>207</sup> McGarry, *Irish Politics*, p. 167.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>209</sup> *Irish Independent*, 16 October 1936.

<sup>210</sup> McCullagh, *Franco’s Spain*, pp. 36-47.

politician, the international communist'.<sup>211</sup> Somewhat inconsistently, for he had argued elsewhere that the only threat to the success of Franco's rebellion was the intervention of foreign forces on the Republican side, he urged de Valera, in unspecific terms, to involve the Irish state on Franco's side, at least to the extent of condemning the atrocities committed by Republican forces.

De Valera's diplomatic silence in response to this request, which characterised his unexpectedly neutral approach to the Spanish conflict generally, must have disheartened McCullagh, but the journalist later suggested to the readers of his book that it could be understood in context. De Valera, he explained in words which were hardly flattering to the politician he had just addressed in such eulogistic terms, was afraid both of the Republican Left in his own country and of O'Duffy; he disliked being reminded that he had Spanish blood in his veins; and – most significantly of all – he was dependent on the British government as well as on British newspapers 'for all his information about Spain.'<sup>212</sup> One recent publication, at least,<sup>213</sup> successfully disposes of his fourth explanation for de Valera's inaction. The other three were no better than hasty surmises by someone who had visited his own country infrequently in the previous three decades, and perhaps only on that single occasion since de Valera had come to power. McCullagh's letter was subsequently printed in pamphlet form and widely circulated. One interested reader was the Viscount de Mamblas, one of Franco's political representatives, who brought up the topic in a discussion with Kerney, the Irish Ambassador to Spain (temporarily exiled to St. Jean-de-Luz, just across the French border) in March 1937. De Mamblas asked Kerney about McCullagh, but Kerney maintained a diplomatic silence on the topic.<sup>214</sup>

McCullagh remained in Spain until some time in 1937, and his by now legendary productivity was evidenced by the fact that his book on the civil war was published in London in the same year. His career, however, was patently on the wane. The causes he had most recently espoused were now increasingly unfashionable, and in some cases understandably – if not always deservedly – so. He and his publishers lost money on his Spanish venture: it was possibly the first of his enterprises which was not accompanied by some material success. As war clouds gathered over Europe he left Paris for New York, and evidently kept in touch with certain currents of Irish opinion there. After the beginning of the second world war, for instance, he made contact with Irish representatives in the United States offering to use his journalistic talents to highlight the discrimination and disadvantages suffered by Northern Ireland Catholics under British rule. Viewed from one perspective, he was about a quarter of a century too early. From another, he could not have been making such a suggestion at a less propitious time: negative publicity in the United States about the effects of British rule (effectively Unionist rule) in Northern Ireland would, at this juncture in world history, have been as unwelcome in Dublin as it would have been in London, and would indeed have seriously compromised British efforts to enlist the USA in the struggle against the Axis powers. As in the case of his earlier appeal to de Valera, his suggestions fell on diplomatically deaf ears.

By the war's end, he was over 70, and living in Morningside Drive in New York, not wealthy but comfortable enough. He was still pro-Franco, and thought that the Caudillo had been ill-served by some of his aides. He was still anti-Bolshevik, although his demonology had now been enlarged to include those traditional oppressors of free-lance journalists, the officials of the United States Internal Revenue Service. By 1950 he had finally finished a long novel –

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>213</sup> Catriona Crowe, Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh, and Eunan O'Halpin (eds), *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, Volume V 1937-1939*, (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>214</sup> Kerney to Department of Foreign Affairs, 6 March 1937. National Archives of Ireland (DFA 119/17)

possibly the same one he had been working on since his sojourn in Japan half a century earlier - about Ireland in 1798.

In April 1953 he was found wandering in a confused state in New York's financial district and became a patient at the state mental hospital at Bellevue, White Plains where, on 25 November 1956, he died at the age of 82, his novel unpublished, his reputation largely forgotten, and unaware of the momentous events in Hungary in that very month which would have served to reinforce so many of his passionately held beliefs. His papers have been lost. Tyrone and Derry newspapers reported his passing and his career, if not always entirely accurately,<sup>215</sup> and there were respectful obituaries in *The Times*<sup>216</sup> and the *New York Times*.<sup>217</sup> The only Irish national paper to note his passing was the one to which he had contributed two decades earlier – the *Irish Independent*.<sup>218</sup>

His reputation as a journalist, and his legacy to the members of his profession who followed him, is mixed. He was an extraordinary example of the way in which, in his era, a passion for journalism, allied to a good education and a fair measure of physical courage and a taste for travel and adventure, could propel someone from relatively humble origins to the peak of their chosen profession in a few short years. Luckily, this is still not impossible, although less likely today. His instinctive political sympathies were with those of modest backgrounds – foot-soldiers, peasants and farmers particularly – rather than with societal elites. He was undoubtedly correct in seeing that the abuse of state power in the early twentieth century was something which could undermine democracy itself. At the same time, his limited range of targets, and the increasing ferocity of his language in an era in which journalism was becoming more bland and less partisan, was infrequently aligned to the public taste or, perhaps more relevantly, to the taste of media owners generally. He was becoming less and less a respected witness to important world events, more and more a crusader, and all of this in an age which was coming to value *realpolitik* in attitude and conservatism in prose style above the occasionally breathless and, at its worst, self-regarding rhetoric of an earlier age of journalism. Despite its shortcomings, much of his writing is still used – albeit with the necessary qualifications - as source material by academic writers.<sup>219</sup> Ironically, the American journalism which came to reject him was to generate, in later years and across the Western world generally, a tradition of investigative and even declamatory journalism, a sort of journalism *engagé*, which was to repeat some of McCullagh's techniques, and replicate much of his indignation at injustice and persecution, even as it turned elsewhere, and to more secular political themes, for its subject matter.

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<sup>215</sup> *Derry Journal*, 28 November 1956; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 29 November 1956; *Tyrone Constitution*, 1 December 1956; *Ulster Herald*, 1 December 1956.

<sup>216</sup> *The Times*, 3 December 1956.

<sup>217</sup> *New York Times*, 26 November 1956.

<sup>218</sup> *Irish Independent*, 28 November 1956.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. e.g. Horn, *U.S. Diplomacy*; Ian McArthur, *Mediating Modernity – Henry Black and Mediated Hybridity in Meiji Japan*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney (2002); Bernard Lewis, *A Middle East Mosaic: Fragments of Life, Letters and History*, (New York, 2000); and Marcus Tanner, *Ireland's Holy Wars: The Struggle for a Nation's Soul 1500-2000*, (Yale, 2001).