

“propaganda against the country”: British newspapers in 1950s Ireland

Abstract: In the 1950s British newspapers made a concerted effort to increase their circulation in the Irish state. Using records held at the National Archives of Ireland this article examines the key political, social and cultural issues that emerged as the newspapers were scrutinised by government and lay-religious bodies for what was perceived as anti-Irish and indecent content. Whereas the files reveal acute sensitivity to such content, they also illustrate very differing reactions among interest groups. While religious bodies demanded a stricter censorship regime, political actors were becoming more attuned to a changing post-war environment in which protectionism had no place.

Keywords: Ireland, British newspapers, politics, society, censorship

Introduction

Following independence in 1922 the Irish Free State remained a member of the British Commonwealth. As near neighbours with a common language, a shared border as a result of partition and a common travel area, the ebb and flow of ideas and people continued much as it had prior to independence. While emigration declined due to the great depression, by the mid-1930s Irish migration to Britain resumed, with 30,000 people arriving in 1936 alone.¹ Post-war, the demand for labour meant that most emigrants remained; the 1951 British census recorded 537,709 people who had been born in the Irish state living in Britain, with 100,000 having arrived between 1946 and 1951.² Between 1951 and 1961 another 408,000 emigrated from the Irish state, with two-thirds of these going to Britain.³ As Mo Moulton has outlined, this shared community ensured that social and cultural relations between both states were sustained through family connections that encouraged travel in both directions.⁴ Independence had, however, amplified the need to stress differences rather than commonalities, with nationalism and Catholicism fusing to create an idealised Irish identity that was counterpointed with a supposedly less moral Britain. This version of Irishness “expressed the interlocking emotions of religion and nationalism and emphasised the superior virtues of Irish Catholicism [and] denounced the dangers to faith and fatherland emanating from the ideologies of an irreligious continent and a pagan England”.⁵ As such, the danger from British cultural imperialism was omnipresent. In 1922 as BBC radio programmes were listened to in the Irish state, they were described by one government minister, J. J. Walsh, as “British music hall dope and British propaganda”. Declaring that “any Irish station is better than no Irish station at all” Walsh facilitated the creation of a station that began broadcasting before the enabling legislation was passed in parliament.⁶ Similar concerns were raised in 1952 in relation to

¹ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921–1971* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 45.

² Delaney, *Demography*, p. 206.

³ Gerry O’Hanlon, ‘Population Change in the 1950s: A Statistical Review’ in Dermot Keogh et al (eds), *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, pp. 72–79 at pp. 75–76.

⁴ Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Inter-War England* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 3. For overviews of the experiences of Irish emigrants in Britain see Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London* (Dublin, 2021), Claire Wills, *The Best Are Leaving: Emigration and Post-War Irish Culture* (Cambridge, 2014), and Ultan Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain* (Dublin, 2001).

⁵ John A. Murphy, ‘Censorship and the Moral Community’ in Brian Farrell (ed.), *Communications and Community in Ireland* (Cork, 1984), pp. 51–63 at p. 51.

⁶ John Horgan, *Irish Media: A Critical History* (London, 2001), pp 15–16.

television when the minister for posts and telegraphs, Erskine Childers, was asked whether he was “aware that in districts along the east coast television broadcasts are being received from another country and whether, in view of the cumulative damaging effect which these broadcasts may have on our national culture, he will take the necessary steps to introduce television broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland with a minimum of delay”. In response, Childers stated that the cost of establishing a television service was prohibitive.⁷ For many decades however, it was newspapers and magazines that were viewed as a threat not only to Irish identity and morality. As far back as 1899 the Catholic Truth Society had condemned the “printing presses in Great Britain [that] daily pour out a flood of infidel and immoral publications some of which overflows into this country”.⁸ In 1926 a senior cleric described the content of British newspapers as “the vulgar, the coarse, the suggestive, the unsavoury, the offensive, the smutty, the ill-smelling” and accused the publications of delivering “moral leprosy” to the Irish people.⁹ As Adrian Bingham has observed, by the 1930s sex-related content had become central to British newspapers as journalists “developed a range of different ways of covering sex – they sought at different times to titillate, to moralize, to advise, and to investigate – but in every case text and pictures were carefully crafted to remain within the bounds of acceptability as defined by their paper”.¹⁰ Such content remained problematic in the Irish state – as did literature that sought to address any aspect of modern life, much of which was banned but which still managed to circulate in the state. As John A. Murphy recorded, the “blanket indictment of the literary luminaries of English speaking Ireland . . . stultified the cultural community”.¹¹ While emigrants returning home “ran the gauntlet of the customs authorities by bringing in banned material”, amongst British publishers “the legend ‘banned in Éire’ was believed to boost sales significantly”.¹²

Concerns also existed on the political plane, particularly in terms of the portrayal of the success, or otherwise, of the Irish state. While such sensitivities had existed since 1922 they became amplified in the 1950s amid the political and economic challenges that engulfed the state. The decade was marked by political instability as four different administrations and five premiers held power between 1948 and 1959. The abrupt decision by the 1948–1951 inter-party government to take the state out of the British Commonwealth and declare a republic was followed in short order by the Mother and Child Crisis – an episode that demonstrated the role of the Roman Catholic Church as a major powerbroker in Irish society. The 1950s also represented a watershed for the Irish economy as the limits of a protectionist economic policy were exposed amid an emerging post-war international economic system.¹³ Such was the concern about the portrayal of the Irish state abroad that the inter-party government created the Irish News Agency (INA) to, in the words of the external affairs minister, Seán MacBride, “give Ireland’s viewpoint on political affairs” and negate “unfriendly, hostile or sensational propaganda about Ireland”.¹⁴ While the rise and fall of the INA (1950–57) has been explored extensively, less researched is type of overseas media coverage of Ireland that prompted the

⁷ Dáil Éireann, vol. 129, 31 January 1952. Irish television began broadcasting in 1961.

⁸ Anon., “Catholic Truth Society of Ireland”, *Irish Times*, 4 December 1899, 6.

⁹ Brother J. L. Craven, superior general of the Irish Christian Brothers, cited in Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (Alabama, 1968), pp. 26–27.

¹⁰ Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life & the British Popular Press, 1918–1978* (Oxford, 2009), p. 2.

¹¹ John A. Murphy, ‘Censorship’, p. 53.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ John Bradley, ‘Changing the Rules: Why the Failures of the 1950s Forced a Transition in Economic Policy-Making’ in Keogh et al (eds), *The Lost Decade*, pp. 105–17.

¹⁴ Dáil Éireann, vol. 117, 13 July 1949.

INA's establishment.¹⁵ It is to such coverage that this article is addressed. Using records held at the Irish National Archives it examines how British newspapers sought to expand their post-war circulation in Ireland, the reaction of politicians and senior civil servants concerned about the state's image abroad, and the activities of campaigners worried about the impact such publications might have on public morality. It does so to establish what the archives tell us about the changing nature of 1950s Irish society. The article counterpoints two aspects of the reception of British newspapers in the Irish state: the political and religious reaction to objectionable content and the popularity of the publications as demonstrated by their large circulation figures. By so doing it illuminates a contradiction at the heart of the Irish independence project: while the Irish were supposedly the most virtuous people in the world, they also needed a stringent censorship regime to protect that virtue. But, as the archives demonstrate, during the 1950s these positions shifted significantly as political actors accepted that the limits of cultural and economic protectionism had been reached.

British newspapers and Ireland 1922–1950

Post-independence, the Irish state remained a significant market for British newspapers. In terms of daily titles, sales of British titles served by the state's largest distributor, Eason & Son, increased from 49,119 in 1926 to 60,707 in 1931.¹⁶ Sunday titles were even more popular. In the late 1920s it was estimated that British Sunday titles had a circulation of over 350,000 per week in the Irish state, with the top-selling *News of the World* accounting for 132,444 of such sales.¹⁷ Post-independence, Irish administrations were sensitive to any criticism emanating from London newspapers on the political or economic legitimacy of the new state. Such criticism included stories in the conservative *Morning Post*. With headlines such as "Chaos in South Ireland: Ministers in a Fortress: A Bankrupt State" (January 20, 1923) and "Fruits of Irish Truce: Two Years of Turmoil: Ruining a Pleasant Country" (July 13, 1923) the Irish administration considered deporting the title's Irish correspondent, C. H. Bretherton.¹⁸ In a seminar vein, police memoranda on the *Daily Express*'s coverage of Dublin's 1934 Armistice Day commemoration described the title's advertising poster – "Dublin's Day of Riots" – as "preposterous as there were no incidents which could have been described as riots". Such coverage, the memoranda concluded, "could only be meant as propaganda against the country".¹⁹ These political sensitivities were paralleled by religious concerns that such newspapers, with their coverage of sexual crime, divorce courts, and contraception, were corrupting the morality of the Irish people. These sensitivities prompted several initiatives to stem the flow of British newspapers to the Irish state. In 1929 the Censorship of Publications Act allowed for a three-month ban on publications that "have usually or frequently been indecent or obscene or have advocated the unnatural prevention of conception . . . or have devoted an unduly large proportion of space to the publication of matter relating to crime".²⁰ A second offence resulted in an indefinite ban. Throughout 1930 this provision was used to ban *World's Pictorial News*, *News of the World*, *Empire News*, *The People*, *Thomson's Weekly*

¹⁵ John Horgan, 'Government, Propaganda, and the Irish News Agency', *Irish Communications Review*, 3 (1999), pp. 31–42. Horgan notes that if British newspapers used INA material they tended to use it only in their Irish editions, "thus totally frustrating the intentions of the agency's founder" (p. 36).

¹⁶ L. M. Cullen, *Eason & Son: A History* (Dublin, 1989), p. 347. Cullen notes that these figures exclude other, smaller, Irish distributors.

¹⁷ Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, *The Problem of Undesirable Printed Matter* (Dublin, 1927), cited in Adams, *Censorship*, p. 28. The circulation of other titles included: *Empire News* (76,698); *Sunday Chronicle* (46,188); *The People* (30,660); *Reynold's News* (28,772); *Sunday News* (22,198); and *Sunday Herald* (15,842).

¹⁸ NAI, NEBB/2/4/9, clippings; NAI, TSCH/3/S4386, memo, 11 June 1923.

¹⁹ NAI, JUS/8/372, memoranda, 12 & 13 November 1934.

²⁰ Censorship of Publications Act 1929, section 7. The act also applied to books; section 6 allowed for a ban on any book found to be indecent or obscene.

News and *Weekly Record* (all on the grounds of excessive crime content); *New Leader* and *Reynold's Illustrated News* (for "advocating the unnatural prevention of conception"); and *The Sporting Times* (for being "usually or frequently indecent"). Following their initial three month ban (June to September 1930), both the *News of the World* and *Thomson's Weekly News* were banned a second time, this time indefinitely, in November 1930 – again on the grounds of excessive crime coverage.²¹ At the outbreak of the Second World War an additional layer of wartime censorship was added to the hurdles faced by British newspapers circulating in Ireland. These new provisions allowed for the suppression of news, comment and imagery, that, in the government's opinion, threatened domestic stability, encouraged domestic partisans, or gave any of the warring states reason for questioning the authenticity of Irish neutrality. Reviewing his work 1945, the controller of wartime censorship observed that "the most important work done by the censorship was in calming a British press infuriated by lying articles that this country was a happy hunting ground for German spies and that, because of our inaction or connivance, serious danger threatened Great Britain from this country".²² Among the British titles banned, for various durations, by the wartime censorship were *Sunday Dispatch*, *Everybody's Weekly*, *Reynold's News* (twice), *Sunday Times*, *Daily Mirror* (twice), *The People*, *News Review*, *News Chronicle* while single issues of *News Review*, *Daily Mirror* and *Picture Post* were seized from newsagents.²³ Some titles discontinued circulation in the Irish state: in 1941 both the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mirror* opted out of such sales.²⁴ By then the volume of British titles circulating in the Irish state had declined dramatically. Government memoranda record that sales of British daily titles dropped from an estimated pre-war average of 20,000 to only 8,000 per day in late 1941. In a similar vein, the sales of British Sunday titles dropped from 200,000 to 85,000 per week over the same period.²⁵ The memoranda, which exclude copies delivered to subscribers by post, outline the 1941 circulation of British titles in Ireland as:

<u>Daily Titles</u>		<u>Sunday Titles</u>	
<i>Daily Mail</i>	3,087	<i>Sunday Chronicle</i>	24,000
<i>Daily Express</i>	1,066	<i>The People</i>	21,600
<i>Daily Sketch</i>	1,550	<i>Sunday Graphic</i>	9,600
<i>The Times</i>	600	<i>Empire News</i>	9,600
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	509	<i>Sunday Dispatch</i>	9,120
<i>News Chronicle</i>	177	<i>Sunday Times</i>	4,728
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	120	<i>Reynolds News</i>	3,360
<i>Daily Herald</i>	76	<i>Observer</i>	1,920

The memoranda attribute some of the circulation decline to a number of factors including the Censorship of Publications Act 1929, the Betting Act 1931 (section 32 of which banned the publication of adverts or coupons relating to gambling on football games), a cover price increase in 1934, and the Irish wartime censorship. But the memoranda noted that the most important factor in the decrease were wartime conditions such as restrictions on the use of paper in Britain, general newsprint shortages, persistent transport difficulties, the continuous late arrival of British newspapers, and the imposition of a "no returns" rule (which left Irish newsagents carrying the cost of unsold copies).²⁶

²¹ Dáil Éireann, vol. 36, 28 November 1930.

²² NAI, D/Jus, wartime censorship review, box no. 4/47/23, undated memo, 1945.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Donal Ó Driscoll, *Censorship in Ireland 1939–1945: Neutrality, Politics and Society* (Cork, 1996), p. 189.

²⁵ NAI, DFA/10/2/13, memoranda, 18 & 19 September 1941.

²⁶ Ibid.

Post-war, the circulation of British newspapers in Ireland began to increase and accelerated after the ending of newsprint rationing in March 1950. That year the Irish Revenue Commissioners reported that the annual total number of imported Sunday newspapers had increased from 15,704,988 in 1947 to 20,268,360 in 1949.²⁷ This situation worried those who, in the 1920s, had been at the forefront of the campaign to curtail the presence of British newspapers in Ireland. Writing to the *Irish Times*, one such campaigner, Rev. Richard S. Devane, observed how British titles were “making a determined effort” to increase sales in the state by the appointment of local sales representatives, the publication of special Irish editions and holding competitions confined to Irish readers. These efforts had increased annual sales of daily titles from 4,571,556 in 1947 to 6,076,284 in 1950 and sales of Sunday titles from 15,704,988 to 23,849,652 over the same period. Asserting that the Irish state was “being inundated by a flood of British publications which undermine the national life and give us false social ideals” Devane called for the imposition of increased tariffs on this “cultural invasion”.²⁸ Devane’s call to arms did not receive the response he may have expected. Instead, his letter was unmercifully mocked by the *Irish Times*’ resident satirist, Myles na nCopaleen, who noted that Devane’s letter was “a plea for more censorship here, an attenuation of Ireland’s contacts with the world, more insularity, more cotton-wool for frail feckless Pat”. Expressing the view that no “responsible Irish newspaper has asked for this kind of protection”, na nCopaleen noted that Irish people bought British Sunday newspapers “for the mad reason that they liked to read them” na nCopaleen concluded that Devane’s call for increased tariffs would put “papers out of reach of all but wealthy persons”.²⁹

Others who found British newspapers objectionable devoted their energies to writing to the government. One correspondent wrote to the justice minister to report that his neighbour was receiving, through the post, copies of the (banned) *News of the World*, concealed in a Scottish newspaper.³⁰ Another requested that the government use its influence “to stop immoral publication of our irresponsible Irishman’s debauched story – Jack Doyle’s immoral life in *Sunday People*”.³¹ The *Sunday Express* came in for regular criticism: one correspondent called on the government to take action “to protect the youth of the country from contamination by filthy journalism”; another wrote to “protest most emphatically against the publication of filthy sexual reports in the ‘Sunday Express’ each week. They are indecent and demoralising to our people”.³² In a similar vein, another correspondent enclosed a clipping from the *Sunday Dispatch* – headed “The Bathing Beauty of the Year” – and pleaded with the justice minister “to stop this horrible stuff”.³³ Coinciding with Devane’s renewed crusade was a co-ordinated campaign to co-opt local government authorities into the campaign. Throughout April and May 1951 numerous county councils passed the same motion – calling “on all public bodies and Christian organisations to take immediate action to restrict the flood of unsuitable and immoral periodicals and newspapers imported into this country through ordinary trade channels and through the post”. These motions were forwarded to the justice minister.³⁴ For its part, the department of external affairs expressed the view that no new sanctions on British titles should

²⁷ Dáil Éireann, vol. 121, 31 May 1950.

²⁸ R. S. Devane, “British Papers”, *Irish Times*, 13 February 1951, 5.

²⁹ Myles na nCopaleen, “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *Irish Times*, 14 February 1951, 4.

³⁰ NAI, 90/102/139 (File 2), letter, 8 November 1949. The letter was forward to the department of posts and telegraphs for follow up.

³¹ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321 A, letter, 17 November 1951. The reply noted that the issue had been referred to the censorship of publications board. Jack Doyle was a boxer renowned for his flamboyant lifestyle.

³² NAI, 90/102/139, letters, 26 November (no year) & 26 July 1956. Replies not on file. As Bingham has pointed out, the *Sunday Express* was to the forefront of the coverage of homosexual offences at this time, Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p. 183.

³³ NAI, 90/102/139, letter, 11 November 1952.

³⁴ NAI, 90/102/139 (File 1), resolutions, April and May 1951.

be introduced. It observed that “one of the most effective lines of foreign propaganda against this country is that it is ‘priest-ridden’ as evidenced by the censorship of publications. It is practically impossible to get a convincing reply across to this type of propaganda and fresh restrictions of the type contemplated would tend only to strengthen it”. It also noted that that it was government policy:

to get the maximum amount of favourable publicity about Ireland into foreign papers, including British papers, and in particular to try to off-set the anti-Irish slant of certain of the material appearing in these papers. There can be no one-way traffic in matters of this kind. The circulation of British newspapers and periodicals in Ireland predisposes their editors to accept favourable material from Ireland and to refrain from publishing offensive material about Ireland, even in their home editions. In short, while we are trying to break through the “paper wall” erected by the British around Ireland, we cannot erect another paper wall of our own.³⁵

By the mid-1950s there was growing concern amongst Irish publishers about the growth of British Sundays in the Irish market. At a meeting of the government appointed Prices Advisory Body in November 1955, John J. Dunne, general manager of Ireland’s largest newspaper group, Independent Newspapers, declared that “a matter of grave anxiety to the two Dublin offices publishing a Sunday newspaper was the vigorous drive by English Sunday newspapers”. Dunne noted that some 435,000 British Sunday newspapers arrived in Dublin every weekend and that some British newspaper companies were seeking to print a portion of their Sunday output in Dublin each Saturday night. The drive for Irish circulation was, Dunne concluded, “an intense one” in which Irish publishers could not compete “because of the vast disparity in profits” involved. He instanced how several British Sunday titles had raised their crossword prize monies above levels possible for their Irish counterparts and how the “vast resources” of such titles allowed them to outbid Irish publications for book rights – which were then published in the titles’ Irish editions.³⁶ Recalling the presence of such newspapers during his 1950s childhood, the novelist John Banville noted that:

the cross-channel papers were forever being denounced from the pulpit for their salacious reporting of scandalous matter: court cases involving vicars and choirboys, divorce suits among the titled, and, best of all, those grisly murders for which the English seemed to have a particular gift, involving heads in top-boxes and bodies under floorboards and limbless torsos being discovered in the mail coach of the night express to Edinburgh.³⁷

It was with such content, as well as the treatment afforded Irish political developments by British newspapers, that government officials and morality campaigners sought to mitigate throughout the 1950s.

British newspapers and Irish political sensitivities in the 1950s

As evidenced by the creation of the Irish News Agency in 1950s, there existed a sensitivity on the part of the Irish body politic in relation to the state’s international image. Several themes emerge from government records in relation to the recording of content that politicians and civil servant viewed as portraying the state or its people in a negative light. Such themes include

³⁵ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321 A, dept. of external affairs memo, 16 March 1951.

³⁶ Anon., “Anxiety about British Competition”, *Irish Times*, 19 November 1955, 5.

³⁷ John Banville, ‘Memory and Forgetting: The Ireland of de Valera and Ó Faolain’ in Keogh et al (eds), *The Lost Decade*, pp. 21–30 at p. 23.

the notion of the Catholic Church having a disproportionate input into Irish political life, the caricature of the Irish people via stage-Irishisms such as political chicanery, alcohol and violent republicanism and the alleged ill-treatment of British nationals who resided in Ireland. In terms of the Catholic Church having a disproportionate influence on public affairs, the Mother and Child controversy of 1951 loomed large. The scheme – initially proposed in 1947 but abandoned due to Church opposition – aimed to deliver free post-natal medical care and advice to new mothers. Revived by the 1948–1951 inter party government the scheme was again objected to by the Church on the grounds that it involved the state in sex education. Following protracted correspondence between Church and State, the government withdrew the scheme, and after his resignation in April 1951 the health minister, Noel Browne, released this correspondence into the public domain. While the correspondence was published on the front page of the *Irish Times*, British publications also covered the controversy.

In an article titled “Faith and Morals” published in *New Statesman and Nation*, Richie Calder declared that the incident and the issues involved – “not only the power but the extraordinary arguments of the Hierarchy [deserved] attention outside Ireland”. Calder observed that the Irish state’s infant mortality rate was “the worst in Europe” at 83 per 1,000 births – “an infant-sacrifice” that made the Church’s position “all the more incredible”.³⁸ As a senior civil servant in department of external affairs, Conor Cruise O’Brien noted that the statistics used by Calder dated from 1943 and the most recent figures (1949) indicated a rate of 53 per 1,000 births – a rate better than France (56 per 1,000) and Belgium (57 per 1,000). O’Brien also noted that Calder’s outdated statistics had been syndicated around the world – including in *La Nación* in Buenos Aires. In a memorandum to his minister, Seán MacBride, O’Brien suggested that a letter be sent to the publication defending the Church’s intervention – “indicating that such interventions were certainly more democratic in a country where the great majority of the people fervently believed in the church concerned than they were in a country of more Erastian hue” – and instancing examples of ecclesiastical interventions in Britain. The letter noted that Calder’s article seemed:

to suggest that Ireland is not really a democratic country because Dr Browne’s Mother and Child Health Scheme which the Hierarchy regarded as morally objectionable, was withdrawn. About 90% of the voters who elect the Irish Parliament, accept the teaching of the Catholic Hierarchy on questions of faith and morals. It therefore seems both right and natural that the Irish Parliament should pay careful attention to the views of the Catholic Hierarchy in this field. In Britain, according to press reports, a bill to grant easier divorce facilities was withdrawn, at the request of the Hierarchy of the Church of England, a body which in 1936, made a more momentous eruption into your [Britain’s] constitutional history. What percentage of the English people accept the guidance of the Hierarchy of the Church of England in matters of faith and morals?

Sensing, perhaps, that such a riposte offered the possibility of extending the controversy, MacBride declined to send O’Brien’s letter. MacBride’s preference was for a letter to solely correct Calder’s outdated statistics as “an official correction would be appropriate and carry most weight”. This letter was sent to the magazine but missed the deadline for the subsequent issue, and, the following week, was set aside by the magazine due to space pressures and ultimately not published.³⁹

Wariness of caricature via stage-Irishisms such as political chicanery, alcohol and violent republicanism was ever present. In 1952 O’Brien sought to mitigate any such coverage

³⁸ NAI, DFA/6/414/73, *New Statesman and Nation*, 28 April 1951, pp. 470–71.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, undated correspondence. O’Brien went on to have a high-profile career in international diplomacy, politics and journalism.

that might emanate from the publication in London of a book, *The Battle of Baltinglass*, which focused on a dispute over the appointment of a new post office official in the eponymous Irish town. When the government minister responsible broke with tradition and awarded the post to a party supporter rather than the family that had held the position for eighty years the townspeople split amid allegations of political jobbery. As the saga became a major political controversy it was reported on worldwide.⁴⁰ In January 1952 the Irish embassy in London alerted O'Brien to the book's imminent publication and described its author, Lawrence Earl, as "a young Canadian journalist of the wise-cracking type and is at present a leader-write on *John Bull*" – a popular Sunday London magazine. The ambassador, Fred Boland, observed that the publisher was describing the book as "very funny . . . [but] we have no idea who gets the funny lines in the book . . . it is dreadful to think we are to be the target of that worst of all types of Anglo-Saxon humour – the overseas or colonial variety".⁴¹ In response, O'Brien undertook to seek friendly reviewers so as to "mitigate the stage-Irish effects" and to ensure that the episode "be treated reasonably from an Irish point of view and not as fun among the natives".⁴² In return Boland undertook to see whether he could secure friendly reviewers for the *Sunday Times* and *Observer*.⁴³ Ultimately, the external affairs minister, Frank Aiken, decided that the book was not worth worrying about: "It is not an attempt to be funny but is an attempt on the part of the author according to his lights to tell the story as a piece of reportage".⁴⁴ The following year, O'Brien noted that there had been "something of a 'flare-up' in recent months of the old hostility, which had been quieter for some years, on the part of the mass-circulation papers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, etc".⁴⁵ His concern at this time was mirrored in dispatches from the Irish embassy in London, one of which contrasted how British newspapers often criticised events the Republic but ignored similar events in Northern Ireland:

It is an interesting speculation how it comes about that so-called "liberal newspapers" and reviews which never tire of publicising the lunacies of Maria Duce and the discoveries of Paul Blanchard, exhibit such an unbroken front of silence and indifference in the face of the absurdities of the Orange and Protestant Committee; the proposed exclusion of the Canterbury Tales from the Six County school curricula, and the undisguised bigotry of Messrs. Porter and Minford. Even Kingsley Martin and Michael Foot seem to forget their liberal knight-errantry when the dragon is a Protestant!⁴⁶

Typical of the type of press coverage that O'Brien despaired of was that which followed the opening in London of Brendan Behan's play "The Quare Fellow". As observed in an embassy report on such coverage, the opening night received much coverage "with plenty of IRA references". It also noted that "the *Daily Mail* hardly referred to the play at all but to the accompanying activities". Accompanied by a photograph of Behan singing the play's theme

⁴⁰ Much of the international coverage stemmed from an INA dispatch which was reproduced in US newspapers. See Horgan, 'Government, Propaganda', p. 37.

⁴¹ NAI, DFA/5/305/14/104/2, Boland to O'Brien, 17 January 1952.

⁴² Ibid., O'Brien to Boland, 25 January 1952.

⁴³ Ibid., Boland to O'Brien, 28 January 1952.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Aiken to O'Brien, 28 February 1952.

⁴⁵ NAI, DFA/6/414/3, memo, 14 April 1953.

⁴⁶ DFA/6/414/3 Memo from Boland to O'Brien, 23 April 1954. Maria Duce was a Catholic lay organisation that campaigned against communism; Blanchard's *The Irish and Catholic Power* (London, 1954) cast a cold eye on the involvement of the Catholic Church in Irish public affairs; Norman Porter and Nat Minford were Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland; Kingsley Martin was editor of *The New Statesman*; Michael Foot was a UK Labour Party MP.

song backstage and headlined “A Very Unusual First Night: Faith, But It Was Just Like The Assizes” the paper recorded the scene thus:

Two special branch detectives sat in the stalls last night and took a close look at London’s strangest first-night audience. Three Irishmen who had come all the way from Dublin slipped out of the theatre through a back exit. All three had been barred from this country because of their IRA activities. But under assumed names they crossed from Eire to see the opening at Stratford’s Theatre Royal in the East End of “The Quare Fellow”, the knockabout prison play written by ex-IRA man Brendan Behan, who has himself served eight years in prison. They joined a strange assortment of guests. In the audience were men whose prison terms totalled over 300 years. There were more than 15 recognised leaders of the pre-war republican movement in the theatre. When, in the middle of this outspoken play about the execution of a prisoner, the Irish national anthem blared over the loudspeakers, half the audience rose from their seats. Republican army men stood rigidly to attention and held up the action. Afterwards Mr Behan told me “We had to borrow the anthem record from the Irish ambassador – I could not find one anywhere in London. Some people said it should never have been played tonight but my mother’s sister wrote it, so I shall perform it just when I like”. With the jailbirds were the celebrities. And after the show society joined the IRA men at the theatre bar.

While the *Daily Express* devoted “most of its space to a serious description and assessment of the play” it also recorded that Behan had “spent eight years in prison for IRA activities”. Similarly, *The Times*, while describing the play as “clearly observed and pungently written” also referred “to the IRA men supposed to be in the audience”. Helpfully, it added that “as they were not in uniform, one could not actually confirm this”.⁴⁷

More seriously, the Irish government also had to deal with allegations of ill-treatment of British nationals who had made Ireland their home. One such story received front-page treatment in the *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle* in February 1955 before being reproduced in the following day’s nationally distributed Sunday newspaper *Reynold’s News*.⁴⁸ Under the headline “Five Years of Terror” the story outlined the supposed experience of the Crundall family who, having purchased a hotel for £20,000, moved to the popular seaside town of Bundoran, County Donegal, Ireland. The move had not worked out and the couple were now living in an attic apartment in Leicester while their seven children (aged between two and twelve years of age) had been surrendered to a London orphanage. Their story was, the *Chronicle* declared, “a shocking indictment of race and religious prejudice in Eire”. The testimony of Beth Crundall left little to the imagination:

When we began to enjoy a good trade, gangs came to break it up. Life became a nightmare. Windows were broken, furniture smashed. Visitors’ cars were stolen from our park. Light fittings were torn out nightly and there were terrible fights. The district was a hotbed of the Irish Republican Army and there were armed men in the gangs. Men in the gangs refused to pay for food, but if we did not serve them they would wreck the place. It was useless to go to the police. They themselves were terrified of the gangs. When we did approach the police at one time we were told that if there was trouble reported from our hotel they would have to close us down.

⁴⁷ NAI, DFA/6/414/ 3 II, clippings, May/June 1956.

⁴⁸ NAI, DFA/5/305/14/104/9, *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle*, 12 February 1955.

The sensational revelations continued inside. Under the headlines “£20,000 Hotel Smashed Up”, “Gangs Forced Low Prices” and “Reign of Terror Ends” the newspaper alleged that when Mr Crundall’s mother died, the local undertaker had refused to bury her in consecrated ground and instead offered the use of a cattle meadow as a burial site; that Mrs Crundall had been forced to sell the hotel’s furniture, her jewellery and wedding ring to make ends meet; that remaining hotel furniture had been seized for non-payment of rates; and that ultimately the family had to “flee to England”. The story prompted an Irish resident in Leicester to send the department of external affairs a copy of the newspaper, noting that “This is the type of article which does a great deal of harm”.⁴⁹ Bundoran Urban District Council also wrote to external affairs minister asking him to “take such steps, at ministerial level, as he deems advisable to have the allegations refuted as they reflect gravely on the state, community, and Garda Siochana [police], and are basically untrue”. The Council denied the area was “a hotbed of republican or armed activity”, and observed that Mr Crundall’s mother had been interred in a local graveyard following a church service. Asserting that “the Crundalls were sympathetically treated and assisted when in need by local people of all creeds and by a local charitable organisation” the Council described the story as “an utterly false indictment”. It concluded its letter with a request that the *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle* send a reporter to Bundoran to investigate the claims made by the Crundalls.⁵⁰ In reply, the minister, Liam Cosgrave, reported that he was “having this matter raised, through the appropriate channels, with the proprietor of this newspaper, to ensure that the true position in this matter is published”.⁵¹

In a confidential report to the department, the tourism body, Fógra Fáilte, noted that the Crundalls had registered the hotel in April 1948 and had commenced business “just as the war boon period for hotels was ending, and this was part of their trouble”. But the report also noted that personal issues were at the heart of their trouble and outlined how the Crundalls had “quarrelled and flung missiles at each other in the presence of the guests, and, I gather, in the presence of the Tourist Board Inspector”. The report also noted how the hotel’s staff had walked out, how Mrs Crundall had run off with the hotel’s French chef, leaving her husband to look after the hotel and children on his own, and how, when she returned the hotel was devoid of guests and “furniture etc. was being sold piecemeal in order to obtain money for essential living expenses”. It concluded by noting that this information was “more or less hearsay evidence and that none of it could be verified sufficiently or used in any clarification of this matter”.⁵² In his reply to the correspondent who had sent the newspaper to the department, Conor Cruise O’Brien observed that “enquiries have shown that the story is completely without foundation” and that the department was taking it up with the newspaper with the aim of it publishing a correction and withdrawal.⁵³ O’Brien also wrote to the ambassador, Fred Boland, in London to inform him that “there is not a shred of truth in these allegations”. He asked Boland to contact the newspaper and inform it “there is no foundation for the allegations in their story and suggesting that it is their duty, in accordance with the normal principals of journalistic ethics, to send a reporter to Bundoran to get the facts of the story on the spot. If they are not willing to do this, it would be clear that they cannot stand over the story as published, and it would be their obvious duty to publish a correction and withdrawal”.⁵⁴ In reply Boland expressed reservations about contacting the *Chronicle* as it had “a very small circulation – so small indeed that they do not publish their figures – and the number of people who will have seen the story is, therefore, very limited”. Noting that the best

⁴⁹ Ibid., letter, 11 February 1955.

⁵⁰ Ibid., letter, 21 February 1955.

⁵¹ Ibid., letter, 9 March 1955.

⁵² Ibid., Fógra Fáilte report, 24 February 1955.

⁵³ Ibid., letter, 8 March 1955.

⁵⁴ Ibid., O’Brien to Boland, 8 March 1955.

the embassy could hope for was “a brief paragraph of withdrawal, probably in some obscure corner, so that the number of people who would notice it would be even less than those who read the original story” Boland surmised that “the paper might well use our letter to revive the whole thing, e.g. by publishing another interview with the Crundalls and the last state of the case, would, therefore, be worse than the first”. Noting that six weeks had passed since the publication of the story Boland was “inclined to the view that the importance of the incident is not such as to make it desirable for the embassy to take action”. Boland also expressed the view that:

that there is no point in trying to follow up the various canards which appear from time to time in the British press – as a rule, of course, we learn only about those which are printed in the London papers. There is really nothing to be gained from doing so except when something of major importance appears in one of the more responsible national journals, and, in such cases, it is obviously essential, if our protest is to be of any use, that it should be made without delay.⁵⁵

In response, O’Brien signalled his agreement but also noted that speed was not always possible “where specific allegations are made [as] the sifting of such allegations inevitably takes some time”.⁵⁶ A more forthright approach was taken in 1957 when *The People* published a story that reported on how, as one politician put it, “auctions of slave-labour” were being held in the west of Ireland. Addressing parliament, the external affairs minister, Frank Aiken, described the report as “a fantastic exaggeration [of] a custom in some parts of the country for men who want agricultural work for a season to meet farmers who are looking for help, in certain towns on certain dates”. Noting that there was no truth that those seeking work were required to demonstrate their strength “by lifting barrels, bending nails or raising carts off the road”, Aiken reported that “an appropriate letter had been written to the editor of the English paper concerned”. Asked whether it was possible for the government “to prevent the sale of such slush” Aiken replied that he had no such powers – an admission that came amid heightened concerns about the moral standard British newspapers circulating in the Irish state.⁵⁷

British newspapers and morality in 1950s Ireland

Along with political concern about how British newspapers portrayed Ireland, much anxiety existed about other content that was viewed as harmful to impressionable minds or which flatly contradicted the official narrative of the Irish being a virtuous people. In this respect crime coverage and sexual morality loomed large. The argument made in relation to such content was an echo of similar debates in the 1920s when parliamentarians lined up to criticise what one deputy described as “harmful newspapers which simply set themselves out to describe crime, particularly sexual crime, with every disgusting detail”.⁵⁸ A similar paternalistic tone informed parliamentary questions about the issue in the 1950s. For example, in 1953 one deputy, Peadar Cowen, asked the justice minister whether his attention had been drawn “to the series of articles appearing in a British Sunday newspaper [*The People*] circulating in Ireland concerning the alleged crime record of a youth”, whether he was aware “that there is grave general objection to the publication of such articles which are a danger to the youth of the country” and what action, if any, would he be taking on the matter.⁵⁹ A briefing note for the minister recorded that the articles concerned “purport to be written by a reformed criminal (Irish) who alleges that he

⁵⁵ Ibid., Boland to O’Brien, 31 May 1955.

⁵⁶ Ibid., O’Brien to Boland, 5 April 1955.

⁵⁷ NAI, DFA/5/340/12/226; Dáil Éireann, vol. 164, 30 October 1957.

⁵⁸ Dáil Éireann, vol. 26, 18 October 1928.

⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 136, 5 February 1953.

is telling of his exploits as a warning to others”. Noting that it was likely such articles “have little or no influence, one way or the other” and that they hardly amounted to “an undue proportion of space” devoted to crime to bring the paper within the ambit of the Censorship of Publications Act 1929, the note asserted that any new legislation to combat such occasional series “would be difficult to frame and even more difficult to defend [as] state censorship based on the standards of a child is irreconcilable with any reasonable conception of freedom of expression”. The note concluded by observing that it was possible that the deputy had submitted the question “with his tongue in his cheek” given Cowen’s “suggestion really is that a paper which is read with interest by a considerable number of people should be banned because of articles which might possibly be unsuitable reading for children and youths with criminal tendencies”. In his reply, the minister, Gerry Boland, declared he had no function in the matter and that anyone who had concerns about the issues raised should address them to the censorship of publication board.⁶⁰

Regardless of Cowen’s motive, others felt strongly about the presence of British newspapers in Ireland. In March 1953 a sub-committee of the Gaelic League – Boycott Objectionable Foreign Literature – wrote to Irish premier (Taoiseach) Eamon de Valera to express its “concern at Dáil Éireann’s [Parliament’s] indifference to the moral, national, and economic harm being caused by the unrestricted flood of foreign publications coming into Ireland at present”.⁶¹ De Valera and the justice minister Gerry Boland subsequently received a delegation from the organisation to hear how British publications “pour into Ireland every week, doing untold harm morally, nationally and economically”. On moral grounds they propagated “an outlook on life which is not merely anti-Catholic or anti-Christian but definitely and deliberately pagan”; on national grounds they kept “our people in a state of mental or intellectual subjection to the foreigner, “conditioning” our people to the idea of inferiority and helplessness as against the foreigners’ superiority and power”; and on economic grounds they frustrated “every attempt to establish a real worthwhile publishing industry in this country”. The delegation insisted that “nothing less than State action could deal with the situation” and urged de Valera and Boland to establish a committee of inquiry to make recommendations to the government. This too had an echo of the 1920s, when similar lobbying had led to the establishment of the Committee on Evil Literature, which in turn led to the Censorship of Publications Act 1929. Careful not to fall into this, de Valera sidestepped the request for an inquiry and, admitting that the problem existed, expressed a desire to receive “practical suggestions as to how it could be solved”. It fell to Boland to be more frank: he told the delegation that “the problem was one jointly for the Home, the School and the Church and he felt that if they could not solve it the State could not”. Ultimately the delegation agreed to submit a memorandum with their views on how the problem they identified might be solved.⁶²

A more serious intervention occurred the following September when a newspaper delivery van was held up in Dublin by masked men who told the driver that “they objected to the circulation of filthy newspapers and in particular to *The People*”. The men took bundles of *The People* and *The Graphic* and tried to set fire to them. When this did not work “they scattered all the papers on the roadway tearing up a number of them”.⁶³ There was much confusion within state departments as to whom might have been responsible for the attack. The police commissioner suspected that the attack was the work of Sinn Féin which had established a group called ‘Cosc ar Foillseacháin Gallda’ (Stop Foreign Publications) and which had been

⁶⁰ NAI, 90/102/139, note for minister, 4 February 1953.

⁶¹ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321, letter, 28 March 1958. The Gaelic League promoted the use of the Irish language.

⁶² Ibid., memo 21 May 1953. It seems the memorandum was never submitted: included in the file is a letter dated 15 July 1953 from one of the sub-committee’s leading lights, Basil Clancy, regretting that the promised memorandum of action items had still not been prepared.

⁶³ NAI, JUS/8/1013, memo, 28 September 1953.

active some months previously “to stop publicity regarding the Coronation” of Queen Elizabeth II.⁶⁴ In contrast, the secretary general of the department of justice, Peter Berry, believed there was “no particular reason to believe that this seizure of English newspapers was political – it is more likely ‘Catholic Action’ at work”.⁶⁵ Though the attack turned out to be an isolated incident, in December 1953 it was reported that posters with the slogan “Immoral Foreign Papers must be kept out of Irish Homes” had been posted around Dublin city.⁶⁶ Despite this pressure the government was keen to allow the censorship of publications board handle the issue. When newspapers were found by the board to have devoted an unduly large proportion of space to crime content they were banned. In October 1955 the censorship board banned the *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Graphic* for three months for such an offence.⁶⁷

For its part, the department of external affairs was less concerned with crime coverage and more concerned with coverage of matters sexual. It kept clippings of any British newspaper that addressed issues such as Irish female emigrants in Britain and the adoption of Irish babies by Americans but did not comment extensively on same. For example, in April 1955 the department filed clippings of a series – “Irish Girls in Britain” – by Nesta Roberts that was published by the *Manchester Guardian* with a brief accompanying note querying whether the series made the case for restricting emigration to females over the age of eighteen.⁶⁸ Within the same file are clippings without comment from the *Sunday Chronicle* on how Ireland was a channel through which British babies were being sent illegally to America for adoption; a story from *Empire News* headed “Baby sold to US in Secret”; and coverage by the *Daily Sketch* of deputy Maureen O’Carroll’s parliamentary question about baby exports.⁶⁹ When, in May 1958, the *Daily Record* quoted a psychiatric social worker as saying that the rate of births outside marriage in Britain was contributed to significantly by the annual arrival of 20,000 females from Ireland “because they wanted to escape the shame of having an illegitimate baby at home” a reader in Glasgow wrote to the department urging it to “take up the cudgel in defence of our Irish girls” and noting that not all Irish female emigrants were “in disgrace” on arrival.⁷⁰ In this instance, a copy of the letter and clipping was sent to Francis Carty, the editor of the *Irish Press* with an unacted upon suggestion that the paper “counter-act the article”.⁷¹

As the 1950s came to a close sensitivity about morally objectionable content increased. The publicity surrounding a series titled “Sex and Society” published by *The Observer* in 1956 was enough to ensure the non-distribution of the issue containing part three – “Family Planning”. The adverts for the series led to the secretary of the censorship of publications board to contact the chair of the Irish Retail Newsagents, Booksellers and Stationers Association and remind the organisation that section sixteen of the Censorship of Publications Act 1929 made it an offence to print, publish, sell or distribute any publication that advocated the “unnatural prevention of conception”. Having been contacted by the organisation *The Observer’s* Irish distributor contacted the paper’s editor “requesting the omission of the offending article. The editor told him that this was impossible as they had only one edition and indicated, apparently, that what was good enough for English circulation was good enough for this country”. When the issue containing the “Family Planning” article arrived at Dublin Airport the distributor formed the opinion that it was “objectionable” and abandoned the consignment to the state.⁷²

⁶⁴ Ibid., memo, 27 September 1953.

⁶⁵ Ibid., memo, 2 October 1953.

⁶⁶ Ibid., memo, n.d. December 1953.

⁶⁷ Anon., “95 Books, 19 Periodicals and One Newspaper Banned”, *Irish Times*, 22 October 1955, 9.

⁶⁸ NAI, DFA/6/414/ 3 II, memo, n.d. April 1955.

⁶⁹ NAI, DFA/6/414/ 3 II, *Sunday Chronicle*, 25 April 1955; *Empire News*, 10 June 1956; *Daily Sketch*, 21 July 1956.

⁷⁰ NAI, DFA/5/305/14/104, *Daily Record*, 10 May 1958; letter, 11 May 1958.

⁷¹ Ibid, letter to Carty, 16 May 1958.

⁷² NAI, 90/102/139, memo, 6 April 1956.

A fear of similar consequences led many British titles to replace content that might be viewed as objectionable. A survey of such localisation was carried out by the Dublin newspaper *Pictorial* which noted that in one edition of *Sunday Graphic* a feature on a nudist camp movie was, for the Irish edition, dropped in favour of a feature on the Duke of Edinburgh. Similarly, it observed that a series on the morals of English teenagers was dropped in favour of a series of pictures of the Vatican. The survey also itemised how images and cartoons were altered so as not to offend Irish readers.⁷³ But while sensitivity among morality campaigners was high, by the late-1950s politicians were tiring of the endless predictions of a moral apocalypse. When a senior assistant to Dublin's Catholic Archbishop, John Charles McQuaid met with the justice minister, James Everett, to complain about the negative publicity that had accrued to the censorship of publications board from *The Observer* incident, Everett made it clear that he regarded that outcome as "all the fault of the board".⁷⁴ The following year, Everett's successor, Oscar Traynor, declined to meet a delegation from the League of Decency, which wished to discuss new censorship provisions, on the grounds that the "League have very exaggerated notions of what is indecent and any discussion with them could not fail to be embarrassing".⁷⁵ In a similar vein, a Catholic Young Men Society resolution calling for "a permanent full time Censorship Department" and the use of emergency powers "to deal summarily with the importers and vendors of the filth" was rejected on the basis that the existing censorship legislation had already excluded "the more disreputable of the English Sunday newspapers".⁷⁶ By the time another complaint – this time declaring that there was "no good reason why the press of Sodom should be allowed in here, brash and unabridged" – was lodged in 1960 the state had moved on to a new era of free trade and engagement with the outside world.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The decade examined in this article is one during which the Irish state lay between two modes of existence – the protectionist-isolationist mode that had been implemented with vigour post-independence and the post-war new world order of free-trade and global integration. By the 1950s "the idea of a virtuous Ireland surrounded by economic and ideational walls of tariff and censorship was dying, but nothing much had yet taken its place".⁷⁸ This state of stasis is sharply illuminated in the material relating to British newspapers held at the Irish National Archives. As the titles engaged in post-war circulation building there emerged a muted response from the Irish body politic. While such an occurrence in the 1920s had been denounced as morally damaging and inimical to the Irish nation building project, by the 1950s this position had ceased to gain currency. The archive material indicates that, during that decade, the censorship regime that had been established to protect a pious Irish identity came undone as a shared community of emigrants ensured that British culture was widely diffused in Irish society – not just by family connections and tourism, but also by emigrants posting and carrying British newspapers home to Ireland. And, despite a new round of moral panic amongst religious groups, senior politicians, as evidenced by the archive material, no longer gave credence to those calling for a revamped censorship regime. This, arguably, represents a resolution of a contradiction at the heart of the Irish independence project. While the Irish were supposedly the most virtuous people in the world, they also needed a stringent censorship regime to protect that virtue. By the 1950s this pretence of an island of saints and scholars was, at a political level, being quietly

⁷³ Anon., "London's Editors are Ireland's Censors", *Pictorial*, 8 December 1956.

⁷⁴ Catholic Diocesan Archives Dublin, McQuaid Papers, AB8/B, note, 13 April 1956.

⁷⁵ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321 A, letter, 18 November 1957.

⁷⁶ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321 B, letters, 2 January 1958 & 20 February 1958.

⁷⁷ NAI, TSCH/3/S2321 C/94, letter, 30 May 1960.

⁷⁸ Tom Gavin, *News from a Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin, 2011), p. 13.

dropped, much to the dismay, as evidenced by the archives, of those who persisted with such notions.

In a similar vein, the archives reveal political sensitivity in relation to how the Irish state was portrayed by British newspapers. Senior political actors sought to combat the stereotypical image of a “priest-ridden” nation of over-indulgent drinkers and violent republicans. While such coverage may have been perceived as belittling the Irish state, the archives indicate that, in the 1950s, sensitivity to such coverage arose not from the post-colonial angst characteristic of the 1920s but from the realisation that the state needed to address its political and economic malaise in the context of greater global economic integration. As Brian Fallon noted, 1950s Ireland represented “a battle between conservatism and renewal . . . fought out virtually everywhere” – a point vividly illuminated by the archive material.⁷⁹ Within government circles there existed embarrassment at British newspaper coverage of the state, which, as the archives demonstrate, became acute when it was realised that such coverage could damage tourism – an industry that the state was actively seeking to develop at this time.⁸⁰ This changing political, economic and cultural dynamic was starkly outlined in 1957 when future Taoiseach (premier) Seán Lemass declared that “our [living] standards must approximate to British standards or our people will go”.⁸¹ By the 1950s a new generation of Irish people “had forgotten British rule, or rather had never experienced it. To them England was rather the progressive welfare state, generous, tolerant and free in a way that independent was not”.⁸² It was within this changing environment that British newspapers repositioned themselves and, as evidenced by the archives, the wide variety of receptions they received – a huge public appetite for their content, religious-led consternation about their impact on morality, political fatigue of endless predications of a moral apocalypse, and pragmatic political and economic concerns about the state’s image abroad – was one that was played out against the backdrop of a slowly changing Ireland.

⁷⁹ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture: 1930–1960* (Dublin, 1998), p. 271.

⁸⁰ Irene Furlong, ‘Tourism and the Irish State in the 1950’, in Keogh et al. (eds), *The Lost Decade*, pp. 164–86.

⁸¹ Anon., “We Can Win Prosperity”, *Irish Press*, supplement, 18 January 1957, 1.

⁸² Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor For So Long* (Dublin, 2002), p. 250.