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Keeping disloyalty within bounds? British media control in Ireland, 1914–19

Control over the media is a key lever of state power. During the First World War and immediate post-war period, British officials in Ireland exercised this power as they attempted to curtail radical Irish nationalism. While state control over the media can be wielded in direct form (usually through suppression), it frequently manifests itself more subtly and indirectly, through moderate censorship for example, especially when the state in question has a democratic dimension and liberal traditions or pretensions. In Ireland in the period covered by this article state interference with the media was both direct and indirect, partially mirroring the dual policy of coercion and conciliation that marked the final years of British governance over the whole island. Neither strategy succeeded in hobbling republican political advance, however, and censorship and suppression came to be regarded by radicals as irritants and obstacles that could be overcome. This republican success was based on the growing power of advanced nationalism, enabled by a distracted enemy and weakened political competition; the winds of change blowing in the republican direction after the 1916 Rising; an environment altered in favour of the radicals by the socio-economic and political domestic impact of the First World War; the legitimacy afforded by success in a newly- expanded democratic framework; and the centrality of national self-determination in the discourse of post-war international politics. This study will reveal the limitations of state media control when that state and its supporting (and weakening) hegemonic blocs are confronted by a sophisticated national revolutionary movement with a critical mass of popular support. British officials, soldiers and censors ultimately failed to marginalise, defeat or silence this group of dedicated revolutionaries and propagandists, who succeeded in adding an international dimension to their support base. Their success undermined Britain's control over the country and diluted the colonial power's ability to dictate the nature, extent and timing of its political and military withdrawal from most of Ireland.

Following the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 and the adoption of draconian powers by the British state under the Defence of the Realm Acts (DORA), Edwardian liberal governance in Ireland came under pressure. Added to the mix of liberal instincts, relaxed attitude and colonialist hauteur that characterised the pre-war Irish administration were emergency authoritarian powers, wartime militarist reflexes and demands for action against radical nationalists by prominent unionists and senior military figures. The result was a Dublin Castle described by British journalist Hugh Martin as 'chaos upstairs, downstairs and in my Lady's chamber with Brute Force sitting in the drawing room'.[1] The sporadic press suppressions of the pre-Easter Rising phase gave way

[1] Hugh Martin, *Ireland in insurrection* (London, 1921), p. 40.

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to a transitional phase when the British tried to control the media as part of the attempt to pacify Ireland – a troublesome distraction from the war – and interfere with the obvious shift that was occurring within Irish politics towards radical separatism and away from Britain's 'weakening bulwark',[2] the Irish Parliamentary Party (I.P.P.). This phase ends with the cessation of official censorship in August 1919, which signalled a shift to a more repressive and authoritarian phase of British policy (which lies outside our scope). This may seem paradoxical, as censorship is usually associated with repression and authoritarianism. But censorship is a flexible weapon of power for states, and can be used, as this article shows, as a form of media management as well as a blunt instrument of repression. DORA gave the authorities both direct and indirect powers with regard to media control – direct powers of repression and suppression, and indirect powers to manipulate and manage. The success of the latter depended on the threat and occasional use of the former as part of chief secretary H. E. Duke's policy after 1916, as summarised by Eunan O'Halpin, of 'careful administration of the law to keep disloyalty within bounds while not needlessly antagonising the nationalist population'.[3]

Within the existing historiography there tends to be a generalised acknowledgement of the existence of a censorship regime, and some contributions make reference to individual acts of censorship and suppression at various junctures, but nowhere is the story of this aspect of British policy in Ireland detailed, or analysed in any depth.[4] Utilising primarily the surviving records of the Press Censor's office, this article adds a new dimension to our knowledge and understanding of political power dynamics in Ireland in this crucial, formative period.

[2] The term was used by E. S. Montagu, financial secretary to the Treasury, in a letter to joint permanent secretary Sir Thomas Heath following a visit to Ireland in February 1916 (quoted in Eunan O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union: British government in Ireland, 1892–1920* (Dublin, 1987), p. 111).

[3] O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union*, p. 135.

[4] Maurice Walsh consulted at least some of these files, and makes limited reference to the censorship regime in the early chapters of a study that concentrates mainly on the 1919–21 period (*The news from Ireland: foreign correspondents and the Irish revolution* (London, 2008), pp 120–2). The most detailed account of the censor's activities published thus far is to be found in James Carty's little-known *Bibliography of Irish history 1912–1921* (Dublin, 1936), pp xxi–xxii, which carries an incomplete list of the censor's 'Circulars to the Press', held by the National Library of Ireland. These were also utilised by Cheryl Herr for background in the chapter 'Culture as censor' in her *Joyce's anatomy of culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986), pp 54–60. Probably the best-known published reference is the reproduction of a censored version of the Sinn Féin 1918 election manifesto in Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (Dublin, 1951 ed.), pp 921–2. Brian P. Murphy has dealt with the issue in relation to the *Catholic Bulletin* in 'J. J. O'Kelly, the *Catholic Bulletin* and contemporary Irish cultural historians' in *Archiv. Hib*. xliv (1989), pp 71–8, and *The Catholic Bulletin and Republican Ireland 1898–1926: with special reference to J. J. O'Kelly* (Belfast, 2005), pp 15–23, and more generally (though with few specifics on the 1916–19 censorship regime) in 'The Easter Rising in the context of censorship and propaganda with special reference to Major Ivon Price' in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *1916: The long revolution* (Cork, 2007), pp 141–68. Ben Novick lists the 'Press censorship files, 1916–1918' in the National Archives of Ireland in the bibliography of his *Conceiving revolution: Irish Nationalist propaganda during the First*

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I

DORA was passed on the outbreak of war in August 1914. It gave the British state a range of extraordinary draconian powers, formalised in an extensive set of Defence of the Realm Regulations (D.R.R.) 'for securing the public safety and defence of the realm', including the power to severely restrict freedom of expression. The main regulations in this regard were D.R.R. 18 relating to the protection of military information and D.R.R. 27 (expanded in 1916 and 1918), which prohibited the spreading of false reports; statements and reports intended or likely to cause disaffection to the king; and material deemed prejudicial to recruiting, training, discipline or administration of the military, the police and the fire services. This applied to all communications, even word-of-mouth. D.R.R. 51 gave the direct power to the military, and later the police, to enter and search premises and seize and destroy printing machinery and type.[5] Press censorship was operated by the Press Bureau in London, which supplied the press with information from the War Office and Admiralty, examined cables and telegrams sent by and to newspapers, and advised the press on the publication of 'doubtful' matter. So-called 'D' notices indicating what should not be published were regularly sent by the Bureau to Irish and British newspapers. The Irish daily newspapers from Dublin, Belfast and Cork were represented in the Bureau's press room, and the Irish press was subjected to identical war-related control to its British counterpart.[6] Censorship of the British press was primarily war-related, though it seeped into the political realm also, with powers being used against dissidents, such as conscientious objectors and radical labour.[7] This politicisation of censorship was facilitated by the vagueness of terminology in DORA, such as 'likely to cause disaffection', and would be far more evident in Ireland, especially after 1916.

When Matthew Nathan took over as under-secretary for Ireland in October 1914 the issue of 'seditious' papers was high on his agenda. He wrote to his superior Augustine Birrell (chief secretary for Ireland, 1907–16) expressing alarm at the content and tone of the republican press. Birrell admitted that he had got into the habit of 'letting the Pig cut its own throat' in relation to these publications. The Irish administration relied on what Birrell dubbed 'the Irish

World War (Dublin, 2010), p. 250, but makes no obvious use of them in a study that could have benefited enormously from closer attention to censorship context. The same author dealt with the pre-1916 suppressions in 'DORA, suppression and nationalist propaganda in Ireland, 1914–1915', in *New Hibernia Review*, i, no. 4 (winter 1997), pp 41–57, and with the postal regime in 'Postal censorship in Ireland, 1914–1916', *I.H.S.*, xxxi, no. 123 (May 1999), pp 343–56. The most detailed published anecdotal treatment of the censorship is in Frank Gallagher's *The four glorious years 1918–1921* (Dublin, 2005 ed.), pp 39–43.

[5] See Charles Cook (ed.), *Defence of the realm manual* (London, 1919), pp 107–8, 116–17 and 166–8.

[6] Sir Edward Cook, Press Bureau, to Decies, 30 Oct. 1916 (N.A.I., Office of the Press Censor (O.P.C.) 2/107).

[7] See Deian Hopkin, 'Domestic censorship in the First World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, v, no. 4 (1970), pp 151–69; Brock Millman, 'H.M.G. and the war against dissent, 1914–18' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xl, no. 3 (July 2005), pp 413–40; K. D. Ewing and C. A. Gearty, *The struggle for civil liberties: political freedom and the rule of law in Britain, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2000), passim.

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Trinity' – the I.P.P. leadership of John Dillon, John Redmond and Joe Devlin – for advice on how to treat the separatists, and they counselled against taking the sort of action being demanded by the unionist press and being considered by Nathan.[8] The I.P.P.'s mouthpiece, the *Freeman's Journal*, came out against suppression on 26 November, attributing the slackness in Irish recruitment to the British army, not to the 'wicked and silly writings of the obscure newspapers', but to the bungling of the War Office. Establishing an Irish regiment and sorting out its recruitment structures was the way forward, not embarking on 'a foolish war on a set of journals, which, but for the advertisement given them by the English Press, would have been so obscure as to be wholly unknown outside the narrow centre in which they circulate'. Nathan, however, was determined to act. A warning was issued to the printers of the dissident press, and on 2 December 1914 the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) paper, *Irish Freedom*, was deemed to contain 'some grossly seditious articles' and all copies were seized. The following day the James Connolly-edited *Irish Worker* appeared with blank columns and a notice that the editorial had been declined by the printer on the basis of the warnings received. On 4 December that printer was raided by police and military, type confiscated and machinery dismantled; all copies of the *Irish Worker* here and in newsagents across Dublin were seized. Fearing for their livelihoods, the printers of *Éire–Ireland*, *Sinn Féin* and *Fianna Fáil* refused to carry on producing these journals. While these did not reappear, new titles quickly emerged to continue the work. The following week *Sinn Féin* and *Éire–Ireland* editor Arthur Griffith and friends brought out the first issue of *Scissors and Paste*, a cleverly constructed compendium of extracts from newspapers in Britain and abroad, selected, in the words of Nathan, 'for their derogatory references to the cause or military operations of the Allies, and for their praise of the methods and successes of the enemy'.[9] A range of other titles emerged over the following weeks, such as *The Worker*, the *Workers' Republic*, *The Spark* and *The Hibernian*. Griffith replaced *Sinn Féin* and *Éire–Ireland* with *Nationality* in June 1915. Most of these papers were printed by Joe Stanley's Gaelic Press in Dublin. Stanley himself produced *Honesty*, the self-styled 'Outspoken Scrap of Paper'.[10]

All of these publications continued to campaign against recruitment and Britain's war, and to advocate the Irish republican agenda. A consignment of Connolly's *The Worker*, which was printed in Glasgow, was seized on arrival in Dublin on 6 February 1915, and on 2 March *Scissors and Paste* was suppressed.[11] The others continued to circulate. In January 1916 the Gaelic Press began to publish *The Gael*, a paper with strong I.R.B. leanings, and in late February *The*

[8] Léon Ó Broin, *Dublin Castle and the 1916 Rising* (New York, 1971), pp 22–5 and 37–40.

[9] Mathew Nathan evidence, *The royal commission on the rebellion in Ireland: minutes of evidence and appendix of documents* (London, 1916), p. 5; circular notice 'To the readers of Éire–Ireland', from Arthur Griffith and Sean T. O'Kelly, 4 Dec. 1914 (N.L.I., Piarais Beaslaí Papers, MS 33,912(1)); *Irish Times*, 4 and 5 Dec. 1914; *Weekly Irish Times*, 12 Dec. 1914.

[10] See Tom Reilly, *Joe Stanley: printer to the Rising* (Dingle and London, 2005), pp 24–5 and Novick, *Conceiving revolution*, pp 29–34.

[11] Notes and correspondence from the Chief Secretary's Office, 30 Dec. 1914 – 2 Mar. 1915 (T.N.A., CO 904/160).

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Times drew attention to its 'seditious' contents. The issue of 18 March contained an article entitled 'The work before us', which urged insurrection. Nathan, who had come around to Birrell's view that the disadvantages of suppression outweighed the advantages, eventually acceded to demands from the military that action be taken. The premises of the Gaelic Press were duly raided on 24 March 1916, thousands of copies of *The Gael*, *The Spark* and *Honesty* were seized, and printing machinery was dismantled and taken away.[12] Copies of these papers were also seized from newsagents, while a raiding party was repulsed at Liberty Hall, where the *Workers' Republic* was produced, by armed members of the Irish Citizen Army.[13] The press at Liberty Hall was where the iconic Proclamation of the Republic would be printed weeks later when the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army staged their fateful rising.

II

In the immediate aftermath of the Easter Rising, a censorship control was imposed so that, as Birrell told the Commons, 'news should not reach the neutral countries, and particularly our friends in America, which would be calculated to give them an entirely false impression as to the importance of what has taken place, important as that is'.[14] This was not entirely successful, and the British military commander in Ireland, General Sir John G. Maxwell, blamed a distorted portrayal in the press for the negative public reaction to his repressive policies. Annoyed by the increasing appearance of what he saw as 'subversive' opinions in the Irish press, many of which were reprinted from mainstream American newspapers, he demanded a strengthening of press control in Ireland.[15] The decision was made to establish an Irish press censorship, separate from, but complementary to, the Press Bureau's operation in London. A press officer on his staff, the well-known sporting peer, Lord Decies, was appointed to head it up at the end of May 1916. On 1 June Maxwell wrote to Irish editors informing them that an Irish press censorship under military control had been established and they were to submit copies of their papers to army headquarters for examination. Additionally, army and police commanders across the country were told to keep the censor informed of any 'seditious literature or pamphlets of an inflammatory nature' they came across in their areas.[16]

The Press Censor took up office at army headquarters at Parkgate in Dublin and sent editors the following list of the type of matter they should be careful about publishing, lest they breach the D.R.R. and allow themselves open to suppression:

– Resolutions and speeches of corporations, county councils, urban councils and boards of guardians;
– Letters from soldiers, connected with 'the late Rising' in Dublin;
– Extracts from American newspapers or private letters to the press from America;
– Criticisms 'of a violent nature', in the form of letters from individuals, related to the Rising;

[12] Ó Broin, *Dublin Castle*, p. 64; Reilly, *Joe Stanley*, p. 30.
[13] *Irish Times*, 25 Mar. 1916.
[14] Quoted in Ewing and Gearty, *The struggle for civil liberties*, p. 338.
[15] Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: the Irish rebellion* (London 2005), p. 308.
[16] Maxwell to all editors, 1 June 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 3/128).

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– Letters from detainees;
– Re-publication of 'indiscretions' made by other papers, either in the foreign or home press.[17]

The last point was a common problem, and numerous warnings were issued regarding this practice. This anomaly was also the subject of frequent complaints to the Press Bureau in London, and the British did begin to issue notices to British newspapers relating to Irish affairs under advice from the Irish censors. While a loose control was established, British newspapers continued to publish items that would not have made it into the Irish press.[18]

Most editors began to submit copies of each published issue, aware that the alternative was submission in full *before* publication, followed by possible suppression. By early July 1916 Decies had been joined by an assistant, Captain R. J. Herbert Shaw, and a small number of office staff. Gradually, the censor's office began to issue specific directions to the press about what not to publish, such as the notice sent in August 1916 forbidding reports of the Listowel Guardians' resolution condemning the execution of Roger Casement. *The Liberator* of Tralee (sister paper of *The Kerryman*) published the resolution with comments without reference to the censor. The editor was warned, but then published a letter that had not been submitted on the prison treatment of Kerry rebel, Austin Stack. When this was reproduced by *The Kerryman*, the papers' printing plant was seized on 29 August. The newspaper was out of circulation until the plant was restored on 21 September, following the signing of a bond by the publishers promising not to re-offend.[19] More generalised instructions were also issued in the early months that had the effect of strengthening self-censorship and overall press control. Some also raised suspicions that Dublin Castle was intent on using the censorship to politically protect itself rather than state security. On 17 August 1916, for example, a circular was sent reminding papers that criticism of the government that was 'likely to cause disaffection' was not permitted. Decies rather weakly explained to the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* that this was not interference with freedom to criticise the government, but rather of attempts to incite public feeling in a way prejudicial to the safety of the realm. He elaborated on this in a later note to the under-secretary: 'Where the policy of the Government has been impugned in so definite a way and with so clear a motive as to be likely to stimulate dangerous hostility, I have censored'.[20] The emergence of a special, effectively political, censorship in Ireland was raised in parliament in August 1916 by John Dillon of the I.P.P., who called it 'an abominable scandal' that Ireland was being subjected to a control not only stricter, but of a wholly different nature to that exercised in England. The unionist *Irish Times* took it upon itself to reply, defending 'the tact, good humour and good sense of Lord Decies and his staff'.[21]

A desire to avoid censoring religious materials led to an interesting situation with regard to the content of the *Catholic Bulletin*, edited by republican

[17] Decies to all editors, 5 June 1916, ibid.
[18] Office of the Press Censor, correspondence with the Press Bureau, Oct. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/107).
[19] 'Kerryman and Liberator', correspondence regarding, 13 Aug. to 21 Sept. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/89).
[20] Decies to the under-secretary, 19 Nov. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/39).
[21] *Irish Times*, 3 Aug. 1916.

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J. J. Kelly, a publication that wrapped its radical separatist politics in carefully constructed religious packaging. The *Bulletin*'s account of the death of Roger Casement in early September 1916 presented him as a pious Catholic and, in the words of Decies, 'cannot fail to stir up the sympathy of a large section of readers who would probably be unaffected by matter of an openly seditious nature'.[22] This point was later backed up by P. S. O'Hegarty in his *History of Ireland under the Union*, where he praised the paper for helping to make the Rising acceptable to a majority in Ireland.[23] Because it maintained that feature beloved of Decies - 'moderation of tone' – and purported 'to be written with a religious motive, [it] is most difficult to censor'. After consultation with Maxwell and the attorney-general, it was decided to allow publication.[24] The *Bulletin* continued to use the religious cloak to smuggle out publicity about the Rising, and features on the martyred leaders were followed by accounts of the injured and imprisoned and photographs of their families. The paper's privileged position in this regard certainly helped it to 'normalise' the Rising in the eyes of many who might not otherwise have been exposed to republican propaganda, but it also had the effect of giving a distorting retrospective Catholic flavour to the rebellion.

So long as martial law, declared following the outbreak of the Rising and not yet repealed, remained in place the powers of censorship were 'unlimited', albeit 'restrained' by policy. However, there was a general reticence on the part of Maxwell and the administration to utilise martial powers; DORA combined with ordinary law was considered sufficient, although Decies did admit that the existence of martial law powers in the background 'rather frightened' the press.[25] The suppression of the *Southern Star* on 13 November 1916 (it reappeared on 16 December) reminded the press of the dangers of transgression, even though the exact offence was never specified in cases of suppression. When martial law was lifted at the end of November 1916, the press censorship was maintained but Decies's operation switched from military to civilian authority, moving from Parkgate to an office at 85 Grafton Street in Dublin city centre. When he met with representatives of the Belfast unionist press in early December, they objected to the continuation of political censorship, claiming that it resulted in the public in Ireland and the rest of the U.K. being 'kept in the dark about the sedition that exists throughout the country, and [that] by censoring these articles more harm than good is done'. In a letter to the new under-secretary, William Byrne (Nathan and Birrell had both resigned following the Rising and H. E. Duke became the new chief secretary in late July), Decies argued that the advantage for 'Irish Unionist propaganda' of allowing such publicity was outweighed by the encouragement it would give 'the physical force party … . Relaxing the present moderate Censorship would undoubtedly result in a return to the former condition of affairs' and give 'an undesirable impression in enemy countries, and in America'.[26] His superiors agreed, and the 'moderate' censorship continued.

The portrayal of the Rising was a key consideration for the censors, as the glorification of it, particularly its executed leaders, was central to the ongoing

[22] Decies to attorney-general, 5 Sept. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 1/53).
[23] Murphy, 'J. J. O'Kelly', p. 75.
[24] Decies to the attorney-general, 5 Sept. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 1/53).
[25] Shaw to Decies, 4 July 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/110) and Decies to Sir Frank Sweetenham, Press Bureau, 25 Nov. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/107).
[26] Decies to Byrne, 16 Dec. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 3/122).

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republican project. As early as October 1916 a circular had been sent to the press prohibiting publication of advertisements for photographs of people 'prominently associated' with 'the late rebellion', and on the first two anniversaries, in 1917 and 1918, all notices, memorial material and matter referring to the Rising had to be submitted for prior scrutiny.[27] Books relating to the Rising were being rapidly produced by Irish publishers, and submitted for censorship. In July 1916 Maunsel & Co. submitted proofs of its *Anthology of the Irish Rebellion*, featuring literary writings by rebel leaders; it was told that publication at that time was 'not desirable' and was advised to re-submit at a later date. In March 1917 the volume was cleared, subject to the deletion of 'certain poems', and was published as *Poets of the Insurrection: Pearse, Plunkett, Thomas MacDonagh, and McEntee*. Also in July Maunsel submitted James Stephens's *The Insurrection in Dublin*, one of the best-known contemporary accounts of the Rising; this was cleared for publication subject to 'certain' deletions, which are not detailed in the surviving records. The following year Maunsel was refused permission to publish executed 1916 leader Thomas Clarke's *Glimpses of an Irish felon's prison life* – it was eventually published in 1922. Also stopped in 1917 were L. G. Redmond-Howard's novel, *Sinn Féin*, and P. S. O'Hegarty's *Sinn Féin: a bird's eye view*, while a volume of the poems of Roger Casement was passed subject to the deletion of his final message from Pentonville Prison. Desmond Ryan's *A man called Pearse* was refused publication in 1918 (it was published in 1919), and in the last days of the censorship in August 1919 Talbot Press was informed that *Under the tricolour* could not be published as it was 'a glorification and justification of the [1916] rebellion'.[28]

The glorification and promotion of the spirit of 1916 became primarily a job for republican printers, who produced pamphlets, leaflets, picture postcards and ballads that were rarely sent to the censor. The police and military were constantly on the look-out for displays in newsagents across the country, and there were regular raids on printers, publishers, shops and private premises. The list of material considered seditious and undesirable by the authorities included the 1916 Proclamation; the 'Soldiers' Song', which would later be adopted in Irish translation as the Irish national anthem, 'Amhrán na bhFiann'; 'Wrap the green flag round me boys', 'The Foggy Dew' and a whole raft of other well-known rebel ballads; a copy of Roger Casement's speech from the dock; statements and manifestos from the Irish Volunteers; and photographs and postcards commemorating the 1916 Rising.[29] They were all refused publication if submitted, and liable to seizure if published anyway and found on sale or in a person's possession. In November 1917 a pictorial portrayal of the Rising titled 'A Dublin barricade: Easter 1916', including a portrait of the wounded Connolly, was blocked on the basis that 'it could only have the effect of producing a feeling of horror amongst the public against the military, and it might only add to the ill-

[27] Decies to editor, *Irish Opinion*, 3 Oct. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 1/56); in general, see 'Circulars to the press' (N.A.I., O.P.C. 9/171) and examples in Carty, *Bibliography of Irish history*, pp xxi–xxii.

[28] Correspondence between Office of the Press Censor and various publishers, 1916–19 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 1/60, 4/178, 11/123, 9/89 (old), 5/36, 8/49, 11/144, 12/207).

[29] See list of 'Seditious publications, 1916–19' (N.A.I., O.P.C. 6/1 (old)) and Dublin Metropolitan Police reports on seizures, 9 Jan. 1917–2 Dec. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904–161).

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feeling now existing'. Also stopped was a print of Walter Paget's famous painting of the scene in the G.P.O. in 1916 before it was evacuated by the rebels, now held in the National Museum of Ireland.[30]

III

The censor regularly issued circulars to the press relating to specific events, reminding editors to submit matters – relating to recruitment, Volunteer drilling, republican speeches, prisoners and so on – that might 'offend' against the D.R.R. Generally speaking, the censor's line was that it was easier 'to gain the acquiescence of the Irish press in restrictions which are specifically laid down, than to leave the application of the general provisions of the D.R.R. to their own construction of them'.[31] Summarising what he regarded as 'seditious matter' for one editor in mid-1917, Decies explained that reference to the Sinn Féin movement or republican songs (so long as extracts were not given) or republican flags was not 'prima facie objectionable'; but where language was reproduced, such as in reports of speeches, that 'justifies the late rebellion, advocates the principle of rebellion in Ireland, or incites to unlawful acts', these were clearly precluded by the D.R.R.[32] Such references were frequently excised from reports in provincial newspapers and in the dailies, as were allusions to Britain's fortunes in the war. The Irish censorship's concentration on internal politics led to a slackening of attention to the control of military information, however, and in mid-1917 the Press Bureau called attention to military information that would not be allowed appear in Britain that was featuring in the Irish press. A reminder was sent to editors not to publish numbers of battalions and regiments, the names of commanders, orders or addresses by commanders in the field, and to submit any letters received from Irish soldiers on the front.[33]

In the run-up to the second post-Rising by-election, in north Roscommon in February 1917, the censor refused permission for the printing of an election leaflet for the republican candidate, Count Plunkett, and banned reports on an election address he gave in Dublin. Plunkett was victorious, however, and this republican success was followed by others.[34] The released 1916 commander, Éamon de Valera, ran for Sinn Féin in the East Clare by-election in July 1917. A 'certain latitude' was given to the publication of his 'inflammatory' speeches in the hope that 'their violence would alarm moderate opinion' and create a 're-action against extremist policy', but to no avail as he swept to victory. This policy was then dropped, and reports of Sinn Féin election speeches were heavily censored.[35] In the meantime, the British government launched the Irish

[30] Decies to Byrne, 19 Nov. 1917, and general correspondence on prints, Nov. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 11/149).

[31] Press Censorship monthly report, Apr. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904/166) (hereafter P.C.M.R. with month and year).

[32] Decies to editor, *Tipperary Star*, 24 July 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/99).

[33] P.C.M.R., Aug. 1917.

[34] Decies to inspector general, Royal Irish Constabulary, 1 Feb. 1917 and to Duke, 7 Feb. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 3/150).

[35] Decies to attorney-general, 17 July 1917 and to Duke, 24 July 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 3/147 and 1/6); P.C.M.R., Aug. 1917.

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Convention in July 1917 in an effort to encourage an internal resolution of the 'Irish problem' by nationalist and unionist representatives. Sinn Féin refused to take part, and the censorship was a crucial aid in minimising criticism of the project; according to Decies, the censorship of increasingly radical Sinn Féin speeches was necessary if the Convention was to succeed. The Office of the Censor was also the conduit through which all official statements from and in relation to the Convention were issued. Assistant censor, Captain Shaw, was temporarily transferred to act as one of the Convention secretaries.[36] With Sinn Féin in the ascendant, sympathetic newspapers like the *Kilkenny People*, which had been warned to toe the line on numerous occasions in the past, overstepped the mark. It was suppressed in late July 1917 and, according to the censor, the effect was to greatly increase the number of proofs submitted by provincial newspapers. Intelligence reports from the south of the country noted the 'chastening effect' of that suppression on local editors.[37]

When the republican hunger striker, Thomas Ashe, died in Mountjoy Jail in September 1917 as a result of force-feeding a major problem was posed for Decies and his staff, as well as for the Castle regime in general. Ashe's death became a huge *cause célèbre* in nationalist Ireland. The press was warned to take the 'greatest care' regarding Ashe, to submit all letters and publish nothing 'likely to cause disaffection'. The Catholic bishop of Killaloe, Dr Fogarty, sent a condemnatory letter to the press, which the censor told the papers not to publish; but the *Freeman's Journal* defied the order (as did the *Clare Champion*), the editor believing that the 'weight of public opinion' needed to be brought home to the government. The authorities were reluctant to act against the most prominent press voice of moderate nationalism, and wished to avoid being seen to censor a bishop, and so declined to act against the *Freeman's Journal*. The *Irish Times* responded by noting 'the apparent decline of the authority of the official Censorship' and saw the *Freeman's Journal* episode as another example of the 'blundering, the timidity, and the inconsistency which have given new impetus to sedition and unrest in every quarter of Ireland'. It argued that if the government was not going to 'mend' the deteriorating conditions in Ireland, then 'it is better perhaps that they become public property' through the lifting of censorship: worse than no censorship was one that 'strains at gnats and swallows camels'.[38] Censorship was briefly relaxed in October 1917, but this 'temporary licence for seditious utterances' backfired. Reports of drilling, marches and seditious speeches filled the provincial press. Decies re-asserted his control in November, and issued a warning to all editors that they were to publish no such reports unless they were the subject matter of a prosecution.[39]

Weekly (and occasionally fortnightly and monthly) papers carrying the republican line began to re-appear from the late summer of 1916. *New Ireland*, *Irish Opinion* and *Irish Nation* were joined by the *Irish Monthly* and Arthur Griffith's weekly *Nationality* in early 1917. Others that emerged included *The*

[36] P.C.M.R., Aug. and Nov. 1917; direction to the press, 2 Aug. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 9/171); Decies to Horace Plunkett, Irish Convention chairperson, 27 July 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 4/238).

[37] P.C.M.R., Aug. 1917; Military Intelligence report from Southern District, 31 Aug. 1917 (T.N.A., CO 904/157).

[38] *Irish Times*, 9 Oct. 1917.

[39] P.C.M.R., Nov. 1917.

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Irishman, *The Phoenix* and *Young Ireland*. (*The Catholic Bulletin*, *The Leader* and the Gaelic League's *An Claidheamh Soluis* were occasionally grouped with them by the authorities.) When British Army G.H.Q. suggested suppression of *New Ireland* at the end of 1916, Decies argued against, stating that it and the other papers were being kept 'within bounds'. If New Ireland were suppressed, Decies contended, then all the republican weeklies should be; 'how far is the discussion of the absolute independence of Ireland as a political theory, entailing, as it must, the development of anti-British feeling', he asked, ' ... to be construed as "likely to cause disaffection"?'. He requested 'guidance' from the chief secretary on this key issue, which was not forthcoming.[40] In the meantime, these papers were instructed to submit full proofs before publication. Griffith's *Nationality* was launched in February 1917. In September the censor was reporting that its circulation was increasing 'very largely' and that it was 'extremely well-written and edited … Much that is written is undesirable but extremely difficult to censor'.[41] Decies successfully argued for a continuation of his existing policy later in 1918, when Lord French had taken over the reins in Ireland and was taking a more hard-line attitude. The censor's argument offers us, in the process, a neat summation of the thinking that underpinned his policy towards the republican press:

> The intellectual pabulum of Sinn Féin is largely provided by these journals. The public buy them mainly to learn the Sinn Féin view of current events and though from time to time reminded of the fact that everything contained in them has passed the Censor, this fact cannot seriously influence their judgement of what they read and the articles, etc. appearing are no doubt generally taken as the full official pronouncement of Sinn Féin policy.
>
> Sinn Féin policy, comment and argument, therefore, reaches the public in a diluted form. If the papers are suppressed or if the hand of the Censor becomes more apparent in their pages, the country will ring with the grievance that all liberty of expression of Sinn Féin policy is gone and there will be some justification for the statement.
>
> The weekly papers are in some respects a safety valve. They might, if suppressed, be replaced by a system of oral and secret communication which is at the moment unnecessary in the purely political sphere. They are further a source of information.[42]

The censor's view held sway against those within the new Dublin Castle regime and the military who wanted suppression, and the weeklies were warned to stop submitting matter that transgressed the regulations as Decies was no longer going to 'assist in sub-editing proofs in order that they may eventually appear in the strongest form which a generous construction of the Regulations permits'.[43] In other words, unless they censored themselves, he would throw them to the wolves.

IV

The Press Censorship Office also acted as a conduit to the Irish mainstream press for British propaganda material, emanating mainly from the press section of the War Office (where worked Irishman, Major Bryan Cooper, who would

[40] Decies to Duke, 13 Jan. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 4/160).
[41] P.C.M.R., Sept. 1917.
[42] Decies to Chief Secretary's Office, 6 Aug. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 6/1 (new)).
[43] Decies to editors of *Young Ireland*, *Nationality*, *Irish Opinion* and *The Irishman*, 15 Aug. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 11/134).

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succeed Decies as Irish Censor in April 1919). An early example was an article from Scottish socialist paper *Forward* in November 1916 criticising Sinn Féin's weakness on class grounds.[44] Throughout 1917 articles by Irishmen in British uniform, such as Private Patrick MacGill (Donegal's 'navvy poet') and Captain D. D. Sheehan of Cork (former leader of the Land and Labour Association and close ally of nationalist politician William O'Brien) were sent by the censor's office to a range of Irish daily and weekly newspapers for publication. This was subtle propaganda in the main; atrocity stories were avoided and, according to Cooper, 'the articles are designed to show that we are superior to the Germans, and are winning the war'.[45] The censorship was also used subtly in relation to shipping losses. In late 1917 and early 1918 it was decided to allow 'a certain latitude' to the publication of stories regarding Irish shipping losses at the hands of the German U-boat campaign. Stories about the impact on Irish families and dependants of lost seamen created a 'very bitter feeling' against the Germans, which had a knock-on negative impact on public opinion of republicans who had made statements to the effect that if Ireland had been Germany's ally, these losses would not have occurred.[46]

Maintaining a particular image of British rule in Ireland for the outside world, particularly America, was another function of the system. This was done through co-operation with the Postal Censorship in Liverpool and London (Ireland did not have its own postal censorship). Published material that the Irish censor felt would serve a useful propaganda function in the U.S. was sent on for forwarding, while details of 'undesirable' matter were sent to Liverpool so that its export could be stopped. A number of Irish papers made it onto a general list of publications that were not to be sent out of the U.K. In May 1917 that list featured the *Catholic Bulletin*, *Irish Opinion*, *New Ireland*, *The Irishman*, *The Nation* and *An Claidheamh Soluis*. The embargo on the latter, the Gaelic League paper, was lifted in November 1917 when it began to submit in full and a translator from the Irish was employed by the censor. Subsequently added to the list were *An Stoc*, *Nationality*, *The Phoenix* and *Young Ireland*. When mainstream newspapers transgressed they were temporarily added, such as the *Clare Champion*, *Mayo News* and *Westmeath Independent* at different stages. This aspect of censorship ended in December 1918 with the cessation of British wartime postal censorship.[47]

By early 1918 an increasing number of provincial newspapers had shifted allegiance to Sinn Féin, while others had come into republican hands. The political temperature was rising as the prospect of conscription loomed and the food crisis worsened. Cattle drives and land seizures alarmed the authorities, and Clare was declared a special military area in February 1918. The *Galway Express*, *Connaught Tribune*, *Weekly Observer* and *Westmeath Independent* had all been 'severely warned' and threatened with suppression in December 1917 and January

[44] War Office to Decies, 5 Nov. 1916 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/110).

[45] War Office and Office of the Press Censor correspondence, Feb.–July 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/110); Decies to editors of Irish daily and large provincial newspapers, 5 Mar. 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/64); Cooper to Decies, 31 July 1917 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/39).

[46] P.C.M.R., Jan. 1918.

[47] Various correspondence between Decies and Chief Postal Censors, Liverpool and London, 1916–18 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 2/108 and 8/54); Chief Postal Censor, London, to Decies, 20 May and 10 Dec. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 8/54).

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1918. Duke's administration appeared to be losing control, and Sinn Féin and the Volunteers grew in strength and confidence, in conjunction with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the general labour movement. Such was the desperation within Dublin Castle that Duke suggested that 'a collected mass of the outrageous utterances of professed rebels should be published all at once with appropriate ridicule and condemnation in order to inform Great Britain, disgust people of common sense and frighten the timid, and possibly enlist the condemnation of the Church'.[48] Decies resisted, fearing an opening of the floodgates. The previous April a series of James Fintan Lalor's writings was permitted publication in the *Irish World*. Now, in March 1918, Maunsel & Co. submitted what was essentially the same collection for publication in book form. Decies's assistant, Captain Shaw (who had finished his sabbatical as secretary to the Irish Convention), advised the censor that 'the ideals of 1916 were the ideals of 1848' and that 'Lalor is a hero to every Sinn Fein Volunteer … . Is it wise to put this incendiary matter into the hands of the young men of Ireland?'. Maunsel & Co. were instructed that the book could not be published 'for the present'.[49]

In April 1918 the British government announced the extension of conscription to Ireland, without the pre-knowledge of the Irish authorities and coinciding with the release of the report of the Irish Convention. Reporting of the Convention had been tightly censored since it began deliberations; the press was now given free rein to publicise its findings, but the ban on reference to proceedings or documents not mentioned in the report remained in place. Violation of this regulation resulted in the only suppression of a unionist paper in this period when the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* was shut down for three days.[50] However, the Convention report was little featured in the press: whatever slim hopes the devolution plans of the Convention had of publicity or success were immediately dashed by the almost simultaneous announcement of the extension of conscription to Ireland. There was an enormous backlash that united nationalist Ireland – Sinn Féin and the general republican movement, the I.P.P., the labour movement, the Catholic Church and the press. Detailed plans for resistance were drawn up, hundreds of thousands signed an anti-conscription pledge and the country was brought to a halt by a general strike. The censor had a hopeless task given the depth and breadth of the opposition. In general, he attempted to keep out the more blatant appeals to armed resistance, and made life a little more difficult by denying newspaper space to notices to union members about the general strike and appeals for contributions to the National Defence Fund. The *Westmeath Independent* was suppressed for referring to the possibility of civil war over conscription, but to little deterrent value, while the *Mayo News* was closed down for five weeks on 1 April.[51] The opposition to conscription was ultimately successful, and Sinn Féin gained most of the political kudos. Largely as a result, Duke resigned in May 1918, followed by most of the rest of the administration. Lord French was appointed viceroy, lord lieutenant and supreme commander of the British Army in Ireland, heralding a shift in British

[48] P.C.M.R., Jan. 1918.

[49] Correspondence, Mar. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/39).

[50] P.C.M.R., Apr. 1918.

[51] Ibid.; correspondence between the proprietor, *Westmeath Independent* and Decies, Apr. 1918 and regarding *Mayo News*, Mar. – May 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 8/67 (old)), 6/2 (old), 9/82 (old) and T.N.A., CO 904-160).

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administrative power in Ireland away from the chief secretary, where it had lain since the beginning of the century.[52]

French took a more hard-line approach towards republicanism, but was persuaded to allow Decies continue his conciliatory censorship hand-in-hand with the wave of repression he initiated – involving DORA powers of internment and declaration of temporary Special Military Areas, and the use of the 1887 Crimes Act, under which areas and organisations could be proclaimed 'dangerous' and the publication of material emanating from them an offence. In early May 1918 seventy-three leading republicans, including de Valera and Griffith, were arrested for supposedly partaking in a conspiracy with Germany (the so-called 'German Plot') and held in Britain for almost a year, thus weakening both Sinn Féin and the Volunteers. The Censorship set itself the task of minimising publicity for the Plot prisoners, and according to the censor, 'the influence of the imprisonment on the public mind' was significantly reduced 'in distinct contrast to the position at the time of the first internments after the Rebellion'.[53] In July, Sinn Féin, the Irish Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and the Gaelic League were proclaimed as 'dangerous organisations' and a licensing system for public gatherings was introduced, effectively pushing the separatist movement underground. Across the summer and early autumn of 1918 republican pamphlets, leaflets, picture postcards and ballads were seized from printers and newsagents. Joe Stanley's Gaelic Press, printer of a majority of them, had its works dismantled by the military in July, before being eventually shut down in early December. His retail Art Depot had been shut by the authorities in October.[54] The *Southern Star*, which was by now being run by republicans, was suppressed on 24 August (and remained so until March 1919).[55] On 11 October the *Evening Herald* was temporarily suppressed for having published unauthorised news about the sinking of the *S.S. Leinster* mailboat in the Irish Sea. All papers were forbidden to allude to the fact that British soldiers had been on board.[56] With the end of the war in sight, Decies sent in his monthly report for October 1918, in which he noted that since its inception the censorship had 'acted like a fire extinguisher on the dangerous element in Ireland. It has not been able to prevent smouldering in places, but there has been no open conflagration. With the coming of peace pourparlers it may stand as the most immediate and visible obstacle to Sinn Fein aspirations'.[57]

V

The war ended in November 1918, but the relevant D.R.R. remained in place, as did the censorship, with the December general election looming. Much of the material seized from the Gaelic Press had been related to Sinn Féin's election

[52] O'Halpin, *Decline of the Union*, p. 157.
[53] P.C.M.R., July 1918.
[54] Dublin Metropolitan Police reports on seizures, 21 Sept.–2 Dec. 1918 (T.N.A., CO 904-161), and P.C.M.R., Sept.–Dec. 1918; Reilly, *Joe Stanley*, pp 122–42; *Irish Independent*, 14 Sept. and 2 Oct. 1918.
[55] Correspondence re *Southern Star*, Aug. 1918–Apr. 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/47).
[56] P.C.M.R., Oct. 1918.
[57] Ibid.

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campaign, and the authorities now combined a censorship of Sinn Féin propaganda in the press with harassment and repression at ground level, including raids on Sinn Féin premises and seizure of literature and the sentencing of people for offences ranging from the singing of seditious songs to putting up posters. From mid-November the censor was 'inundated' with election material from printers, much of it 'undesirable'. Deletions were made to Sinn Féin's 'Manifesto to the Irish People' when it was submitted by the press in mid-November.[58] Sinn Féin won a substantial majority of the Irish seats and the elected members who were not imprisoned or on the run assembled on 21 January 1919 for the first meeting of the the secessionist parliament, Dáil Éireann. Decies had tendered his resignation, but was persuaded to remain by French, and the meeting of the Dáil convinced him of the need to continue his regime. The press was instructed not to publish the 'Democratic Programme', the 'Declaration of Independence' or speeches proposing and seconding the Declaration. The 'Message to the Free Nations' and the 'Constitution of the Dáil' were passed for publication, as well as some minor speeches.[59] The Dáil tried to use the daily and weekly newspapers to assert its claim to be the sovereign authority, leading to a ban on the widely featured 'Sinn Féin Notes' in the press in February 1919. Also censored were references to de Valera as president and to the existence of the 'Republic'. Dáil Courts were regarded as 'bogus' and an 'unjustifiable assumption of power', but their decisions were watched, and if they made Sinn Féin unpopular, then publicity would be allowed for them.[60] The Volunteer paper *An tÓglach* was being printed secretly since the suppression of the Gaelic Press, and boasted in this period that its continued existence was causing 'perturbation' in the minds of its enemies: 'It is the free authentic voice which Irish patriotism possesses, for it laughs at the British Censorship even as Volunteers laugh at British "Courts", civil or martial'.[61]

The volatility of the country from a British point of view, and the broader revolutionary potential that existed, was illustrated in April 1919 by the general strike in Limerick that became known as the Limerick Soviet, when the workers ran the city for twelve days in response to the declaration of the city and surrounds as a Special Military Area under DORA. On orders from the chief secretary, 'all instructions, bulletins, permits issued by the Strike Committee in Limerick' were refused publicity by the censor, who also arranged for the interception of press telegrams to British publications referring to the Limerick Soviet.[62] British journalists were coming to Ireland in increasing numbers at this time and control of the content of the British press became a very live issue in April 1919 when it was announced that the Press Bureau would close at the month's end. Allied to the previous ending of postal censorship, the Irish censor's power to control exported news and the Irish coverage in the British press, which

[58] Ibid., Dec. 1918; Decies to under-secretary, 19 Nov. 1918 and chief secretary to Decies, 27 Nov. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/47). For deletions to the manifesto, see Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, pp 921–22.

[59] Decies to Press Bureau, 22 Jan. 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 8/49 (new)).

[60] P.C.M.R., Feb. 1919; chief secretary to Decies, 22 Feb. 1919 and Decies to under-secretary, 11 Aug. 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/47).

[61] *An tÓglach*, 15 May 1919.

[62] Correspondence with chief secretary re 'Limerick Soviet', Apr. 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 6/1 (new)).

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would then reappear in the Irish press as well as in British titles that circulated in large numbers in Ireland, was much diminished – so much so that Decies believed the job to be impossible and tendered his resignation again, which was accepted by French on 28 April. Major Bryan Cooper was announced as his replacement. Cooper had worked as a censor in Salonika before taking up a position with the press section of the War Office. He maintained the same 'chummy' relations with editors and representatives of the mainstream press as Decies had.[63] His main duties, as he outlined them in a memo, were removing 'offending passages' from reports of seditious speeches, stopping inflammatory letters to the daily press, and removing 'violent passages' from accounts of attacks on the police or military, which he felt was 'the most valuable function of the censorship … particularly as almost all the local reporters of the Irish daily papers are Sinn Féiners'. He also stopped written attacks on individual policemen by name, which the police – the primary, initial target of the I.R.A. in the developing conflict – welcomed. In relation to the Sinn Féin papers themselves, he explained to a visiting American journalist that he allowed them 'publish articles purporting to prove that Ireland would be better off under a Republic (though I do not allow them to say that the Republic is in actual being, or that they swear allegiance to it)'.[64] The last newspaper to be suppressed before the ending of censorship was the *Kilkenny People*, on 12 August following its publication, in deliberate defiance of the censor, of extracts from a speech by Count Plunkett.[65]

Irish censorship was lifted on the last day of August 1919. *Young Ireland* declared itself to be 'in no way elated' and was inclined to apply a 'more subtle interpretation than the man in the street' to what seemed like a progressive development. Now that the censor was gone,

> we do not feel nearly so secure as we did some weeks ago … . The latest move is merely a subterfuge to embark on a wholesale campaign of closing down not only Sinn Féin papers, but any publication committed to the demand that Ireland be granted the right of self-determination.[66]

Events would prove *Young Ireland*'s fears were not unfounded. On 12 September the Dáil was declared illegal and the National Loan (or Dáil Loan) to fund the revolutionary government was declared seditious. Advertising the Loan opened the press to suppression in the new, post-censorship landscape and in the words of republican propagandist, Erskine Childers, 'the principal outcome of the loan was the opportunity it afforded the military authorities of suppressing the Sinn Féin press, metropolitan and provincial'.[67] Not only the Sinn Féin press, however, as the first newspaper suppressed for publishing the Loan prospectus was the I.P.P.-supporting *Cork Examiner* on 17 September. This was followed by *Nationality*, *New Ireland*, *The Republic*, *Irish World*, *Fáinne an Lae* and the I.T.G.W.U. paper, *Voice of Labour*. Twenty-two papers in all were suppressed in

[63] See Lennox Robinson, *Bryan Cooper* (London, 1931), pp 120–1.

[64] Press Censorship memorandum, Aug. 1919; Cooper to Foreign Office, 10 July 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 5/47 and 9/72a).

[65] Correspondence, Aug. 1919 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 11/136).

[66] *Young Ireland*, 6 Sept. 1919.

[67] Erskine Childers, 'Law and order in Ireland' in *Studies*, viii, no. 32 (Dec. 1919), p. 602.

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September, and a further three in October. According to the *Watchword of Labour*, 'The real offence of these journals … was their very existence'.[68] The republican media went underground, and the first edition of the secretly-published and highly effective *Irish Bulletin* was produced in November 1919. *The Times* condemned the 'dragooning of the Irish press', and gave prominence to a protest letter from Cooper, the recent censor, which condemned the new policy, especially the suppression of provincial newspapers. He pointed to what he saw as the gravest problem of the new policy – that it was both futile and self-defeating:

> Sinn Féin has its secret printing presses, and the prospectus of the Dáil loan is doubtless by now being passed from hand to hand all over Ireland. The Government have given it the best advertisement it could possibly desire. In the second place, this policy causes infinite irritation. Many a man who takes little interest in politics and regards the suppression of Sinn Féin meetings with apathy will be roused to anger by the non-arrival of his favourite paper … it would surely be wise to abandon a procedure which only tends to inflame and exasperate moderate opinion in Ireland.[69]

Cooper's warnings were ignored. The experiment of utilising the indirect power of censorship to keep disloyalty within bounds had failed, and was replaced with the direct power of repression and coercion. In the formulation of Hugh Martin, 'Brute Force' had been released from the 'drawing room'.

VI

The perceived powerlessness of the advanced nationalist movement at the outbreak of war in 1914, and the belief in Dublin Castle that radical propaganda was not significantly influencing public opinion and that its suppression would be counterproductive, led to initial tolerance. This provoked unionist outrage, leading to sporadic suppression. The Easter Rising of 1916 heralded the establishment of a special Irish political censorship system that controlled the Irish press and publishing until August 1919, after which a subtle, conciliatory, pseudo-voluntary censorship regime was replaced by coercion and the blatant suppression of dissident media. So, sandwiched between the sporadic suppressions before the Rising and the widespread repression of the press that followed the onset of the War of Independence, was a curious period in which the British state in Ireland used predominantly indirect power in the form of censorship, backed up by the permanent threat and occasional use of direct power, in an attempt to manage and manipulate public opinion and the dynamics of Irish politics. It was felt preferable to have a muted, freely-circulating radical press than an underground, unfettered media, not only because, according to the press censor, 'Sinn Féin thrives upon repression' and because under a subtle censorship 'Sinn Féin policy, comment and argument … reaches the public in a diluted form',[70] but also because that way, international – especially American – opinion could be given the impression that expression in Ireland was relatively

[68] *Watchword of Labour*, 4 Oct. 1919.

[69] *The Times*, 27 Sept. 1919.

[70] P.C.M.R., Aug. 1918; Decies to Chief Secretary's Office, 6 Aug. 1918 (N.A.I., O.P.C. 6/1).

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free. The hope was that Ireland would be pacified to allow Britain concentrate on the war, the crisis of British governance would pass, 'disloyalty' and 'extremism' would be corralled, and the transition to some form of home rule would occur. The conscription crisis of 1918 followed by Sinn Féin's election victory signalled the failure of this policy, and highlighted the limitations of media control, amongst many other facets of British power in Ireland in this period. By the end of 1921 Britain was negotiating its withdrawal from most of the island with the revolutionaries it had tried and failed to marginalise and silence.

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