‘INDECENT AND SUGGESTIVE PICTORIAL MATTER’: BANNING *PICTURE POST* IN IRELAND

Abstract

As an innovative photojournalism publication with a left-of-centre worldview, *Picture Post* was hugely popular in Ireland but also has the distinction of being one of the most frequently banned periodicals in early twentieth-century Ireland. Senior church figures and morality campaigners viewed its photojournalism as indecent and obscene and engaged in a sustained decades-long battle to ban the publication. Utilising records held at the National Archives of Ireland, this article examines the campaign against *Picture Post* as a case study to offer a deeper comprehension of the Catholic Church inspired crusade against popular ‘foreign’ and ‘immoral’ publications. Understanding the motivations and rationale for targeting periodicals such as *Picture Post* is central to illuminating not just the censorship mentality that dominated Irish life in the period under consideration but is central also to appreciating the rational offered by morality campaigners in favour of the Irish censorship regime.

Keywords

Picture Post, Ireland, censorship, photojournalism, Catholic Church, periodicals

Introduction

As an innovative photojournalism publication with a left-of-centre worldview, *Picture Post* was hugely popular in Ireland but also has the distinction of being one of the most frequently banned periodicals in early twentieth-century Ireland. While its politics – which advocated greater state involvement in welfare and healthcare – would have been anathema to the ‘vocationalist’ position of the Catholic Church in Ireland, and while the Irish *Catholic Standard* newspaper regularly took issue with *Picture Post’s* critiques of Irish social organisation, its banning always related to issues of morality.[1] Senior church figures and morality campaigners viewed its photojournalism as indecent and obscene and engaged in a sustained campaign to ban the publication. Utilising records held at the National Archives of Ireland, this article examines this campaign to offer a deeper understanding of the Church inspired crusade against popular ‘foreign’ and ‘immoral’ publications. The archives demonstrate an acute sensitivity on

the part of Catholic moral entrepreneurs to images that might be construed as 'suggestive' of immorality. In section one, a brief overview of the origins and legislative provisions relating to print censorship in Ireland is presented alongside a description of the type of content targeted by morality campaigners and an outline of the difficulties they encountered in establishing a case against periodicals. Section two examines the origins and worldview of *Picture Post* while sections three and four offer a detailed examination of the campaign waged against the publication by senior clerics and morality campaigners. As observed by both Rafter and O'Brien much attention has focused on the effect the Irish censorship regime had on books rather than on periodicals.[2] Understanding the rationale for targeting periodicals such as *Picture Post* is central to comprehending not just the censorship mentality that dominated Irish life in the period under consideration but is also central to appreciating the rational offered by morality campaigners for the strictures of the Irish censorship regime.

The Irish censorship regime

As noted by Rafter, 'throughout the 1920s, leading British newspapers continued to sell strongly in the Irish market. Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* carried over their intense circulation battles from the Irish market into Ireland'.[3] Prior to Irish independence, as noted by Michael Adams, religious sensitivities towards British newspapers that were perceived to carry 'objectionable material' – coverage of sex-related crime, the divorce courts, any mention of contraception, and any irreverent reference to Christianity – was acute.[4] Post-independence, as outlined by both Horgan and Keating, such sensitivities translated into sustained political pressure.[5] Following a period of intense lobbying by Catholic bishops and lay groups the Irish government enacted the Censorship of Publications Act 1929. Section 7 of the Act allowed for a three-month ban when issues of a periodical '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'.[6] A second offence resulted in a permanent ban. Though daily titles did not escape censure, much angst was directed towards British Sunday newspapers due to their coverage of sex-related crime. Their prevalence – or popularity in Ireland – was outlined in a pamphlet, *The Problem of Undesirable Printed Matter,* published by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CTSI) which listed the 1926 circulation figures of such titles as follows:

News of the World	132,444
Empire News	76,698

Sunday Chronicle	46,188
The People	30,660
Reynold's News	28,772
Sunday News	22,198
Sunday Herald	15,842
Total	352,802[7]

No sooner had the 1929 Act become law than it was utilised to ban several British newspapers. In the Irish parliament, the justice minister, James FitzGerald-Kenny reported that between May and November 1930 *World's Pictorial News, News of the World*, *Empire News*, *The People*, *Thomson's Weekly News* and *Weekly Record* had been banned on the grounds of excessive crime content; *New Leader* and *Reynold's Illustrated News* had been banned for 'advocating the unnatural prevention of conception'; and *The Sporting Times* had been banned for being 'usually or frequently indecent'.[8]

Catholic lay organisations were to the fore in identifying offending publications. In July 1931 the CTSI complained that several issues of the *Daily Worker* had carried birth control adverts and the title was banned for three months. A similar complaint led to a permanent ban in November 1936 – despite protestations by its distributor that he personally removed such adverts before supplying the title to newsagents. Three years later the ban was lifted after the title informed the justice department that it no longer carried contraceptive adverts and gave an assurance that it would not carry such adverts in the future.[9]

However, the irregular nature of such adverts provided objectors with an obstacle: it left them unable to demonstrate frequent or successive publication of such adverts (successive publication being defined by the censorship board as three issues published within a fourteen-day period). For example, in August 1934, Francis O'Reilly, executive secretary of the CTSI wrote to the head of the Irish police objecting to an article on birth control that had appeared in *News Chronicle* of July 26 1934 and observing that the requirement of successive publication rendered the Censorship Act moot:

> There is an article on Page 8 which is definitely against the law and on which police action should be taken under Section 16 of Censorship of Publications Act, 1929. I cannot submit the case to the censorship board as I cannot comply with their regulations . . . These papers publish articles of this kind from time to time, but they keep outside the regulations. They can offend on every fifteenth day![10]

Having been told that there was nothing that the police nor the justice department could do, O'Reilly declared that this implied that the law could be 'defied with impunity'.[11] Such perceived shortcomings in the censorship legislation led the CTSI to establish a working group, the 1937 report of which noted that the unless successive publication was replaced with single instance offending then daily newspapers could advocate contraception without danger of legal consequences in 90 out of 312 issues a year, weekly newspapers 26 out of 52 issues, and monthlies 6 out of 12 issues. Concluding that the existing law 'does not provide for sufficiently close supervision of periodical publications', the report called for 'the present cumbersome system to be replaced by a simple, expeditious system' of instant banning based on one rather than successive offences.[12] This report was submitted, in October 1937, to government which, in December 1938, concluded that no change to the law was 'necessary or advisable' (*Catholic Standard*, February 23, 1940).[13] Indeed, in July 1938, a justice department memorandum had recorded that 49 British and American periodicals had been served with a three-month ban, with 17 receiving a second (permanent) ban. Of the 49 bans, 28 related to indecency and obscenity; 15 related to crime coverage; and six related to birth control matter. The memorandum also noted that the British newspapers that remained permanently banned were *News of the World, Empire News, New Leader, Thomson's Weekly News,* and *Daily Worker*.[14] As the CTSI's demand for a revamped censorship regime was not accepted by government, objectors sought to combine complaints of indecency and obscenity with complaints about birth control matter – a tactic embraced with gusto by high ranking Roman Catholic clerics who objected to the content of *Picture Post*.

Picture Post

Published weekly between 1938 and 1957, *Picture Post*, despite its pioneering photojournalism, has been neglected by media historians.[15] The origins of the publication lie with its first editor, Stefan Lorant, a Hungarian photographer and film director who had edited *Munchener Illustrierte* (*Workers Illustrated*) in Munich. Fleeing Germany in 1934, Lorant arrived in Britain and established a number of short-lived magazines, including *Weekly Illustrated* for the Odhams Press and the self-published *Lilliput* magazine. While working at Odhams Press Lorant met Tom Hopkinson, then a junior journalist, who later recalled that it was at this time that he came 'to recognise photography as a journalistic weapon in its own right'.[16] The third figure in the story of *Picture Post* was Edward Hulton, a barrister and unsuccessful Conservative parliamentary candidate. Hulton had, in 1936, inherited his father's

fortune, which had been amassed on the sale, in 1923, of a publishing empire that had included *Daily Sketch* and the *Evening Standard.*[17] Hulton used his inheritance to create Hulton Press which, following the sale of Lorant's *Lilliput* magazine to the company, launched *Picture Post* with Lorant as editor and Hopkinson as assistant editor. First published in October 1938, the prospect of war hung over the project with Hopkinson later observing that 'if war came everyone would want war pictures, so the magazine would quickly find a public: and if there was peace, *Picture Post* could get away to a flying start on the general feeling of relief'.[18] This optimism proved well-founded: two months after the first edition the print run had increased from three quarters of a million copies to one million copies. Four months after its launch *Picture Post's* print run was 1,350,000: a figure less than the bestselling *News of the World* (3,350,000) but greater than that of the *Sunday Express* (1,096,000).[19] Given his Jewish background, Lorant was sensitive to the plight of Germany's Jewish population. In November 1938, *Picture Post* published a feature titled 'Back to the Middle Ages' that profiled various Nazi leaders and alerted readers to the pogroms then occurring in Germany. The feature represented, in Hopkinson's opinion, 'the finest use of photographs for political effect'.[20] In June 1940, amid fear of a German invasion, Lorant left for America with Hopkinson succeeding him as editor.

In 1941 *Picture Post* published a special issue, 'A Plan for Britain', inspired by 'letters from the forces [that] showed how intensely concerned they were that post-war Britain should be very different from pre-war [Britain]'. The special issue advocated policies such as 'full employment, minimum wages throughout industry, child allowances, all-in social insurance, a state medical service, planned use of all land, and a complete overhaul of education'. Such was the response from readers that *Picture Post* organised a conference in London so that readers could hear more about these ideas from experts in various fields. Two years later, *Picture Post* embarked on 'a campaign on behalf of the Beveridge Report on social security'.[21] Such an approach chimed, initially at least, with the views of Edward Hulton who, in 1943, had published a book, *The New Age*, which called for 'a change of heart and a new spiritual and social urge' and for more national and international control of business 'in an economic system combining nationalization and private enterprise'.[22] As recalled by Hopkinson, *Picture Post* sought 'to influence events in a particular direction – that of a more just and equal society'.[23] Indeed, Hopkinson described the staff, which included Fyfe Roberson, Robert Kee, Anne-Scott James and James Cameron, as 'a talented, individualistic, somewhat hard-boiled group of journalists, distrustful of authority, not apt to accept slogans, or to swallow without examination the assumptions of power politics. So far as it had a common political alignment,

this would be left, though not very far left, of centre'.[24] Among the socially aware picture-stories published by *Picture Post* and highlighted as memorable by Hopkinson were 'Life in a Mental Hospital' (November 23, 1946), 'Inside Holloway Prison' (September 13, 1947), and 'Life in the Elephant and Castle' (January 8, 1949) which examined modern urban life.[25]

In one of the few analytical works on *Picture Post*, Stuart Hall observed that the publication was a product of the fusion of 'the tradition of social comment and *rapportage* which Hopkinson inherited through English journalism and political writing in the Thirties, and the revolutionary developments in layout, typography and photography which flowered on the continent, in both commercial and avant-garde circles, in the inter-war years, and of which Lorant himself, and his photographers were able exponents'.[26] As Hall saw it, *Picture Post's* 'social eye' or its 'socially structured ways of seeing' emerged from developments in British society that 'enabled some people to look hard at society in a new way – not comprehensively, but in a manner and to a degree unstructured by the traditional frameworks of class, deference and power which interposed such powerfully-constraining "ways of seeing" between social experience and the camera lens'.[27] These developments – which 'began to open up structural fissures in the social fabric of the society' – included the experience of mass unemployment in the 1930s; the collective response to the common enemy of Fascism; the mass mobilisation of society which 'interrupted the traditional and conventional social rules and relations which ensured stability and continuity'; and the 'political consequences of mass civilian mobilisation'.[28] Other key developments included an emergent emphasis on documentary film; the establishment in 1937 of Mass Observation ('a movement devoted to observing and recording the infinite variety of social habits of the British people'); and the 'literary documentary and *rapportage*' of authors such as George Orwell. These combined to create 'an emergent form of social consciousness' and, according to Hall, *Picture Post* was the key media organ of this 'innovatory way of seeing . . . in which some of the urgent social questions were urgently aired, and from which, undoubtedly a distinctive political awareness was also generated'.[29] As Robert Kee put it, *Picture Post*'s philosophy 'lay in the conviction that the lives of ordinary people, of the sort of people in fact who read the magazine, could be shown to be in themselves rewarding to curiosity, even remarkable and of worth'.[30]

By 1945 Hopkinson was convinced that 'a Labour Government would seek to bring about that changed pattern of life in Britain which men and women in the Forces were resolved upon'.[31] Indeed, Edward Hulton wrote a resounding welcome to the election of Clement Attlee's Labour government in 1945 and expressed relief that 'the form of Conservatism represented by Lord Beaverbrook, and aided and abetted by Mr Churchill in his latest phase,

has been flung indignantly overboard'.[32] Despite such proclamations, Hall noted that while *Picture Post's* 'social eye was a clear lens . . . its political eye was far less decisive'. In Hall's view *Picture Post* 'pinpointed exploitation, misery and social abuse, but always in a language which defined these as "problems" to be tackled and remedied with energy and goodwill". Thus it 'never found a way . . . of relating the surface images of these problems to their structural foundations [and never developed] a language of dissent, opposition or revolt'.[33]

Picture Post and Ireland

Picture Post then, offered a sociologically-informed left-of-centre, rather than a religiously informed way, of looking at society – a view that would have been anathema to the Irish Roman Catholic Church which, around this time, was arguing the merits of 'vocational' rather than state-led organisation of health and welfare.[34] But it was *Picture Post's* photojournalism that attracted the ire of Irish Catholic clerics. The human interest aspect of its photo-essays covered everything from swimwear contests, to urban life, crime, and art and would lead *Picture Post* to be the most-regularly banned British periodical in Ireland. It was banned no less than a dozen times between December 1939 and July 1956.[35] Indeed, such was the suddenness and frequency of the bans that *Irish Times* resident satirist Myles na Gopaleen gleefully pointed out that the state-owned national transport company CIÉ was regularly guilty of breaching Section 14 of the Censorship of Publications Act 1946 which prohibited the advertising of any banned periodical publication. Given that the company's buses carried adverts for the magazine, na Gopaleen noted that the company was in receipt of 'advertising revenues accruing from a gross illegality' (*Irish Times,* August 20, 1948). While circulation figures are not available at this remove, *Picture Post* was popular in Ireland: in 1941 writing in *New Statesman* of wartime conditions in Ireland, Elizabeth Bowen noted that 'English newspapers and periodicals can be obtained on order. *Picture Post* is in constant demand'.[36]

Less than three months after the magazine's launch came the first letter of complaint to the censorship of publications board. In February 1939 Rev. J. A. Twomey protested 'against the indecent and suggestive pictorial matter contained in several editions of *Picture Post*, which has a wide sale in each week in Cork'.[37] The following month Rev. M. J. Hennelly lodged a complaint with the censorship board on the grounds that the magazine was 'indecent and obscene'. Photographs of art were the source of his objection, with Hennelly declaring that such images 'may be alright for the art-lover, but for the ordinary boy and girl they are abominably suggestive'.[38] The religious press also took a dim view of the publication with the *Irish Catholic* announcing its alarm at 'the vulgarity and suggestiveness of the illustrations

which appeared in it every week'.[39] In an attempt to demonstrate the magazine's sequential indecency John Charles McQuaid, then president of Dublin's Blackrock College and soon to be Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, lodged a detailed complaint with the censorship board.

McQuaid alleged that obscenity and indecency or advocacy of contraception or excessive coverage of crime had occurred twelve times in the issue of January 21, 1939; eight times in the January 28 issue; six times in the February 4 issue; twelve times in the February 11 issue and eight times in the February 25 issue. Among the content McQuaid objected to in the latter two issues was a photograph of a female model in a swimsuit; a photograph showing the lower legs of female roller-skaters; photographs of statues of the female form at London's Crystal Palace; photographs of female mud wrestlers; and a photograph of a painting of a nude female sleeping on a couch.[40] McQuaid had longstanding concerns around the portrayal of the female form in print. In his memoir, long-time editor of the *Irish Press* Tim Pat Coogan recalls the firm's controlling director, Vivion de Valera, telling him about how, during his schooldays at Blackrock College, he had once been summoned to the college president's office. There, McQuaid instructed de Valera to review a pile of newspaper cuttings of full-page adverts for Cleary's, Dublin's largest department store. The adverts, Coogan recounts, included 'small line drawings of women modelling underwear of a design which reflected the modest standards of the Ireland of that era'. To the young de Valera McQuaid pointed out 'the insidious immorality of the drawings. Some of them, if one used a magnifying glass, indicated the outline of a *mons veneris'*. The message was duly delivered by Vivion to his father, Eamon, who was then Irish premier (Taoiseach) and controlling director of the Irish Press Newspaper Group.[41]

Despite the detailed nature of McQuaid's complaint to the censorship board, *Picture Post* was not banned, but it is clear that representations were made to the publisher. In March 1939 it voluntarily removed a two-page feature, 'The Painters of Paris', leaving those copies that arrived in Ireland with pages missing. This prompted a protest from R. M Smyllie, editor of the *Irish Times*, who assumed that 'the Customs authorities had carried out these minor operations for the sake of the moral health of the Irish community'. But having contacted *Picture Post,* Smyllie was informed that the feature had been removed by the magazine itself on the grounds that it 'might offend the susceptibilities of your [Irish] censors' (*Irish Times*, April 4, 1939). Despite this self-mutilation on the magazine's part, the censorship board continued to receive letters of complaint. In October 1939 a Dublin newsagent complained that *Picture Post* had 'a huge circulation in the city' and noted that 'it's terrible to think this awful filth is in a Christian country'. She also recorded how she had refused to stock the magazine and had referred it to the priests of her parish.[42] The following month (November 1939), an

article, 'The Fate of Homo Sapiens', by H. G. Wells referred to the Irish Free State and declared that 'censorship of books and controlled education have produced a crop of young men as blankly ignorant of the modern world as if they lived in the thirteenth century, mentally concentrated upon the idea of bringing the Protestant North under Catholic control in the sacred name of national unity'. Referring to the IRA's bombing of Coventry the previous August, Wells asserted that the attack had been 'carried out by young priest-taught men who purify their souls at mass and confession before they leave a bomb in a London underground station'. Describing the Catholic Church as 'that clumsy system of frustration, that strange compendium of ancient traditions and habit systems' he declared it 'the most formidable single antagonist in the way of human adjustment'.[43] This prompted a flurry of complaints to the censorship board: one letter described it as 'nothing short of a national scandal that such journals should be allowed to enter Irish homes'; another described Wells' article as 'highly blasphemous'; yet another described *Picture Post* as 'not fit reading for the family in our Catholic state'.[44]

Another complaint lodged by John Charles McQuaid claimed that *Picture Post* had been indecent or obscene four times in its October 28 issue, six times in its November 4 issue and twice in its November 11 issue.[45] In mid-December the censorship board accepted McQuaid's complaint and banned the publication for a period of three months. Two days before the board took this decision it had received a letter of complaint signed by several 'concerned citizens' which noted that 'Mr H. G. Wells, through this periodical has, by a subversive attack on the Catholic Church, been guilty also of a subversive attack on the Constitution, and such an attack, in the best interests of all of the citizens of the State must be viewed with apprehension, and any periodical used or permitted to be used as the vehicle of such an attack must be prohibited'.[46] The date of the ban was December 16, 1939, but, at the request of the magazine's Irish distributor, Eason & Son, the justice department held back publishing the official notice in the government gazette, *Iris Oifigiuil*, until December 22. This allowed for the distribution of the issue of December 20 which had already arrived in Ireland. However, a request that the December 27 issue – 26,000 copies of which were in Liverpool awaiting dispatch to Dublin – be allowed to circulate in the state, subject to the justice department clearing its content, was rejected.[47] Responding to the banning, Francis O'Reilly of the CTYI noted that '*Picture Post* had been watched by more than one person over a long period on account of its tendency to print pictures which, if they were not all objectionable, on a number of occasions went over the border-line of decency'. O'Reilly also returned to his argument against the need for three successive issues of a periodical to be deemed offensive before it could be banned by noting that if the censorship regulations 'were less liberal, it is probable

that *Picture Post* would have been banned on the grounds of indecency and obscenity long before the appearance of the Wells' articles' (*Catholic Standard*, January 5, 1940). For its part, the weekly newspaper that acted as the unofficial voice of the Catholic Church in Ireland, the *Catholic Standard,* ran a nine-part series denouncing the various works of H. G. Wells. Written by regular columnist, president of University College Cork, and later priest, Prof. Alfred O'Rahilly, one article described Wells' *Picture Post* article as containing 'offensive guttersnipe references to our religion and our country' (*Catholic Standard*, January 12, 1940). In a postscript to the series, O'Rahilly called on the Irish people to 'withdraw our support of these imported tawdry periodicals which merely want to extract our money while mocking our religion and despising our nationality' (*Catholic Standard*, March 8, 1940). Interestingly, the ban prompted a protest: in January 1940 a petition signed by 35 people from various towns around Ireland was sent to the censorship board. Describing *Picture Post* as 'one of the most human, impartial, and democratic papers recently circulating in Eire' the petition argued that 'an occasional representation of nudity or semi-nudity, in a periodical which aims at giving a comprehensive view of modern life, does not constitute a general tendency to indecency'. It concluded by noting that 'any action whose chief effect is to hinder the free circulation of varying opinions is detrimental to the moral and intellectual interests of the country and *Picture Post* provided a most valuable open forum'.[48]

The ban also prompted a visit to Dublin by *Picture Post* proprietor Edward Hulton, who noted that 'under British rule in the Eighteenth Century, Dublin was the abode of wit and refinement . . . To-day it has been compared to the capital of a small Balkan State . . . culture will not survive under a censorship' (*Picture Post*, January 20, 1940). In response, Alfred O'Rahilly of the *Catholic Standard* declared that 'if culture is dependent on the importation of British pornography, then we say frankly: to hell with your culture' (*Catholic Standard*, February 16, 1940). When Hulton Press sought a revocation of the ban in February 1940 it was required by the justice department to give an undertaking to 'ensure nothing will be published in the periodical in future which would be likely to be considered objectionable by the Censorship of Publications Board'. As no such undertaking was provided the ban continued for the statutory three months.[49]

The ban expired at the end of March 1940 and in an attempt to mend relations with the Irish authorities *Picture Post* commissioned a special issue, 'The Story of Ireland', for July 27, 1940. Writing to Irish premier Eamon de Valera, assistant editor Tom Hopkinson noted that the special issue would attempt 'to treat the whole subject in a way that would be at once friendly and impartial'.[50] The cover image – captioned 'The Faith of Eire: An old Irish peasant

with a child' – was a photograph of a man and a young girl sitting beside an open fire and praying with a set of rosary beads. Amongst the themed content was a ten-page, pictorial feature on Ireland with text by the American writer Tania Long; a discourse on the history of Ireland, written by Irish revolutionary and journalist Dorothy Macardle; and an exposition of a typical Irish village by Douglas Macdonald Hastings which respectfully noted the centrality of the priest in Irish life. However, the issue was immediately banned, this time under wartime censorship regulations, as one of its articles referred to a news item that the censorship authorities had prohibited Irish newspapers from publishing – the capture of a boat carrying two Germans and a cargo of explosives off the Irish coast. This was denounced by the Irish censorship authorities as 'a not very thinly disguised attack' on Irish neutrality.[51] As the issue had already been distributed it had to be seized from irate newsagents.[52] Later, Dorothy Macardle recalled Hopkinson telling her that he had been informed of the ban, but not its rationale (*Irish Times*, June 26, 1957). As newsprint supplies became scarcer, in May 1941 *Picture Post* reduced the volume of copies sent to Ireland.[53]

'*Picture Post* Piffle'

After the war *Picture Post* continued to have a strained relationship with the Irish censorship authorities and morality campaigners. In early 1947 Edward Hulton again visited Ireland and his subsequent article 'Ireland Revisited' recorded his impressions of how neutral Ireland had 'contracted out of the modern world [and] the main stream of human events' to the extent that the state seemed 'to be in a permanent backwater'. Hulton also described the Irish censorship regime as 'onerous and fantastic' and, in an inelegant phrase, noted how 'literature is in many ways priest-ridden'. Hulton also criticised what he saw as the 'puritanical strain' that characterised Irish life and the 'priestly influence' that resulted in 'well-meaning but unenlightened interference with the moral life' of Irish people (*Picture Post*, June 7, 1947). In response, in an article headlined '*Picture Post* Piffle', the *Catholic Standard's* Alfred O'Rahilly accused Hulton of wanting 'to become our people's father-confessor himself – ladling out birth in pictures and similar stuff' (*Catholic Standard*, June 27, 1947). In a subsequent article, 'A modern "priest" in mufti', O'Rahilly compared Hulton (whom he described as 'a self-ordained journalistic-pontiff') to a list of British figures and missionaries who sought to convert Irish people to Protestantism with the promise of soup during the Irish famine of 1845–51:

> He preaches a weekly sermon, he inculcates his own brand of morality, and of course he collects his weekly 'dues' from as large an Irish congregation as possible. But this sacerdotal-commercial mission suffers from ideological rivals: Catholic clergy and educators, whose influence makes our people highly critical of the pronouncements of this journalistic missionary. We resisted the rather drastic efforts of Elizabeth, Cromwell, and Anne; even the more succulent blandishments of the souper gangs. But our most recent reformer thinks that we may succumb to more up-to-date 'softening-up' tactics: we are not to be liquidated or even souped, we are to be painlessly picture-posted. To help to hasten the process, he denounces his competition, our Catholic clergy. As if the unrestricted dominance of an irresponsible and alien weekly press were not a modern and much more objectionable form of 'clericalism'!

Hulton, O'Rahilly concluded, was 'not content with the humble role of providing gossip and illustrated news, plus a bit of sex-appeal. He wants to convert us to his omnium-gatherum philosophy of life, to destroy the influence of our own educational institutions' (*Catholic Standard,* July 4, 1947). Between July 1948 and June 1956 *Picture Post* was banned on indecency grounds on ten occasions with each ban being lifted on appeal or following assurances given to the censorship board.[54] For example, in July 1948, it was banned in relation to a two-page article 'Should A Family Be Planned?' by Fyfe Robertson which was published in its June 12, 1948 edition. Wary of what the article would mean for business *Picture Post's* three Irish distributors – Eason's of Dublin, News Brothers in Cork, and Porter's in Derry – all 'acted in concert in removing the objectionable pages'. For its part the *Catholic Standard* applauded this pre-emptive censorship on the part of the distributors and denounced the article as 'a gross insult to Irish Catholics' (*Catholic Standard,* June 25, 1948). Under the headline 'Mutilated Copies in Éire' *Picture Post* criticised the action of its distributors and informed them that it would rather suspend sales than submit to such behaviour (*Picture Post*, June 26, 1948). But despite the removal of the article, *Picture Post* was banned by the Censorship of Publications Board, a ban that was lifted on appeal in October 1948. In addition, some issues were withheld or sent back: in June 1951 one issue was not sent to Ireland due to a two-page photographic feature titled 'Behind the Beaded Curtain', the subject matter of which was 'Life in a Harem'.[55] And, in January 1956, one issue was withdrawn following consultations with the publication's Irish distributor; the consensus being that its colour feature story on the Swedish actress Anita Ekberg might 'offend public taste' and lead to another ban (*Irish Times*, January 6, 1956).

By this time, *Picture Post*, as a viable enterprise, was in trouble. Despite its joy at the Labour Party victory of 1945, as the Labour government endured the economic turmoil of the post-war years, differences of opinion began to emerge between Hulton and Hopkinson, with the latter receiving 'a shower of notes complaining that the paper was too left-wing; that we were "soft" in our attitudes to the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe; that we were guilty of "appeasement" in our attitude to the arch-enemy Russia'.[56] In February 1950 Hulton returned to the pages of *Picture Post* to call on readers to vote for the Conservative Party and, in Hopkinson's words, 'in five years a considerable gap had opened between the proprietor and the editorial staff, personified by myself'.[57] Later that year, Hulton and Hopkinson rowed over the appropriateness of a story that exposed atrocities committed on war prisoners by the South Korean army. Hopkinson knew that the story 'might cause difficulties, since any criticism of "our side" could be regarded as anti-Western and therefore – in the climate of that time – pro-Eastern and hence, by another small stretch of meaning, as "Communist propaganda"'.[58] While Hopkinson advocated publication, he received an instruction from Hulton that 'the Korean story must on no count appear'.[59] When Hopkinson sought to assert his right as editor to decide *Picture Post's* content he was invited by the board of Hulton Press to resign – an invitation he declined before being unceremoniously fired.[60] A succession of editors, price increases and changing editorial ethos followed with Hopkinson later observing that 'stories appeared which were better suited to certain Sunday newspapers and, when these did not draw readers, there would be a serious number or two'.[61] A drop in circulation to below 600,000 saw *Picture Post* publish its final edition in June 1957.

Conclusion

The origins of the Irish censorship regime lay in religious-inspired objections to what was viewed as indecent and obscene content in terms of sex-related crime coverage, reports from the divorce courts, and birth control adverts. However, the advent of *Picture Post* was a new source of consternation to Irish moralists who, as John A. Murphy observed, 'expressed the interlocking emotions of religion and nationalism and emphasised the superior virtues of Irish Catholicism [and who] denounced the dangers to faith and fatherland emanating from the ideologies of an irreligious continent and a pagan England'.[62] As an innovative photojournalism publication with a left-of-centre worldview, its warts and all portrayal of modern life was anathema to the Irish post-independence purity project that sought not just to protect the Irish population from 'suggestive content' but also from content that might suggest alternative modes of social organisation to that promoted by the Catholic Church. *Picture Post's*

photographic-essay coverage of the life of the unemployed, modern urban life, and the daily workings of institutions such as prisons and other places of incarceration was at odds with the secretive workings of those entrusted with the running of such institutions in Ireland. Similarly, *Picture Post's* strong advocacy of state intervention in the provision of services jarred with those who, in Ireland, viewed the provision of such services as the sole domain of the Catholic Church.

But, notwithstanding this ideologically objectionable journalism, it was photographic content of the female form – alongside birth control content – that was relied upon by morality campaigners to convince the censorship board to ban the publication. Throughout its existence, and despite the *Catholic Standard's* constant criticism of *Picture Post's* journalism, it was such photographic content that, as late as 1956, resulted in the publication being regularly banned.

Such content was at odd with the carefully constructed and curated view of Irish society as being virtuous and free from the supposed vices that afflicted the outside world. Thus, the circulation of any publication that challenged this illusion by means of supposedly indecent content, or content that questioned the dominant position of the Catholic Church in Irish society, was to be restricted as effectively as possible. While this research has focused on the experience of one publication, *Picture Post,* its experience is illustrative of the difficulties that British publications faced in seeking to maintain or build market share in post-independence Ireland. The study of the archival records of *Picture Post's* engagement with Ireland reveals a sustained surveillance project on British publications by morality campaigners and members of the Catholic hierarchy. They reveal the difficulties that such campaigners encountered in proving sequential rather than one-off instances of indecency on the part of periodicals; that readers occasionally grouped together to lodge protests with the censorship board; and that Irish distributors, without reference to publishers, sometimes excised troublesome content from periodicals prior to delivering them to newsagents. The archives also provide an insight into the rational offered by morality campaigners in favour of the censorship regime and the characteristics of the censorship mentality that dominated life in early twentieth-century Ireland.

Notes

1. For an overview of the Irish Catholic Church's approach to social organisation see Garvin (2005), 276–281. The Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation (1944) which was ignored by the Irish government, represented, in Garvin's words 'a disregard for

electoral democracy, a contempt for politicians and public servants and a subconscious arrogance derived from the bishops' belief that they were the rightful rulers of the country' (279).

2. Rafter, "Evil literature", 409; O'Brien, "Policing the press", 15.

3. Rafter, "Evil literature", 411.

4. Adams, *Censorship*.

5. Horgan, "Saving us from ourselves"; Keating, "Censorship".

6. Censorship of Publications Act 1929, section 7. 'Indecent' was defined in section 2 of the Act as 'suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or unnatural vice or likely in any other similar way to corrupt or deprave'.

7. *The Problem of Undesirable Printed Matter* (1927), cited in Adams, *Censorship*, 28.

8. Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliamentary Debates), November 28, 1930.

9. National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), 90/102/104, letters, July 16, 1931–May 15, 1939.

10. Section 16 of the Censorship of Publications Act 1929 made it an offence for any person, except under government permit, to print, publish or distribute any publication that advocated 'the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage'.

11. NAI, 90/102/28, letters, August 9 & 23, 1934.

12. Adams, *Censorship*, 77–80.

13. Adams (*Censorship*, 80) notes that the campaign for law reform petered out in 1941 as the CTSI acknowledged that 'the restrictions imposed upon cross-Channel publishers as a result of the War have made the problem less pressing'.

14. NAI, 90/102/137, memo, July 11, 1938.

15. For example, in a recently published survey of twentieth-century British and Irish publications, *Picture Post* receives occasional mention, but no sustained analysis. See Conboy and Bingham, *Edinburgh History.* For a case study of *Picture Post's* 'pre-war presentation of the importance of the ordinary' see Law, "Picture Post".

16. Kee, *Picture Post Album*, 2. For more on Lorant see Hallett, *Real Story* and Hallett, *Stefan Lorant*.

17. Kee, *Picture Post Album*, 4.

18. Hopkinson, *Picture Post*, 10. See also Hopkinson, *Of This Our Time.*

19. *Picture Post* figure from Hopkinson, *Picture Post*, 11; *News of the World* and *Sunday Express* figures from Martin (1935).

20. Ibid., 11.

21. Ibid., 15.

22. Ibid., 17.

23. Kee, *Picture Post Album*, foreword.

24. Hopkinson, *Picture Post*, 17.

25. Ibid., 16.

26. Hall, "Social eye", 72.

27. Ibid., 87.

28. Ibid., 88–95.

29. Ibid., 95–102.

30. Kee, *Picture Post Album*, 9.

31. Hopkinson, *Picture Post*, 16.

32. Ibid., 18.

33. Hall, "Social Eye", 109.

34. For an overview of the Irish Catholic Church's approach to social organisation see Garvin (2005), 276–281.

35. This figure is arrived at from an examination of files held at the National Archive of Ireland and an examination of the lists of banned publications published by the *Irish Times.*

36. Elizabeth Bowen, 'Eire', *New Statesman*, 1941 (republished in Lee, H. (ed.) *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Virago Press, 1986), 30–35, at 33).

37. NAI, 90/102/154, letter, February 24, 1939.

38. Ibid., complaint, March 16, 1939.

39. Cullen, *Eason & Son*, 275.

40. NAI, 90/102/154, complaint, March 1, 1939.

41. Coogan, *Memoir*, 158–159.

42. NAI, 90/102/154, letter, October 26, 1939.

43. Ibid., *Picture Post*, November 4, 1939. Wells' article was based on his recently published work *The Fate of Homo Sapians: An Unemotional Statement of the Things that are Happening to Him Now, and of the Immediate Possibilities Confronting Him* (London: Martin Seeker and Warburg, 1939).

44. Ibid., letters, November 5 & 6, 1939.

45. Ibid., complaint, November 16, 1939. The complaint again pointed to 'suggestive' photographs as indecent content.

46. Ibid., letter, December 13, 1939.

47. Ibid., letters, December 21, 1939. In its January 13, 1940 issue *Picture Post* ran a one-page feature headed ‘We are banned in Ireland’ in which it accused the censorship board of banning the publication ‘without having the courage to admit the true reason for the ban’.
48. NAI, letter, January 26, 1940.
49. Ibid., letter, February 26, 1940.
50. Ibid., 97/9/165, letter, July 22, 1940.
51. Irish Military Archives, MA 2/33 CBB, July 30, 1940, cited in Cole, *Propaganda*, 57.
52. Ó Driscoll, *Censorship in Ireland*, 195.
53. Cullen, *Eason & Son*, 369.
54. Each ban and revocation was listed in the *Irish Times*, which was the only newspaper to itemise the activities of the censorship board. Such detail was also published in *Iris Oifigiul*, the official gazette published by the Irish government.
55. Cullen, *Eason & Son*, 276.
56. Hopkinson, *Picture Post*, 18.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 19
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 20.
61. Ibid., 21.
62. Murphy, “Censorship”, 52.

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