

Getting into Colonel Bryan's 'Black Books':

**Michael Sayers and New York's PM newspaper on Espionage
and Anti-Semitism in Neutral Ireland, 1944**

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Abstract

This paper begins by examining a series of articles by Michael Sayers published in the New York newspaper PM in March 1944 and the official response denying the existence of anti-Semitism in Ireland they prompted. The content of the articles and the character of the official response to them are then evaluated.

Introduction

Philip Roth's 2004 novel *The Plot Against America* imagines a USA in which Franklin Roosevelt has lost the 1940 presidential election to Charles Lindbergh, the renowned aviation pioneer turned 'America First' advocate. Strong Roosevelt supporters, the Jewish residents of the Weequahic neighbourhood of Newark, New Jersey, are deeply dismayed by this turn of events but uncertain as to what it portends. Is Lindbergh intent on building a unified nation with a foreign policy that is shaped by its own best interests - which he views as being distinct from those of the British Empire and of international Jewry - or is he heading down the road of racial persecution pursued by the Axis Powers he is reaching accommodations with? For his part, the insurance company employee who is the father of the novel's child narrator is in no doubt about the evil direction in which his country is heading and constantly draws confirmation for this judgement from a trusted radio commentator, Walter Winchell, and from his chosen newspaper - 'when he walked about the house now a copy of *PM* was constantly in his hands, either rolled up like a weapon - as though he were preparing, if called upon, to go to war himself - or turned back to a page where there was something he wanted to read aloud to my mother'.¹

PM is not a novelist's invention but a remarkable tabloid whose eight year lifetime began in June 1940 across the Hudson from Newark in New York City. According to its historian, Paul Milkman, *PM* was 'an enormous financial failure' whose losses were borne mainly by one very wealthy backer - Marshall Field III who was the heir to a vast department store fortune. Yet it could at the same time claim credit for having brought about 'scores of innovations in newspaper publishing'. These included the way in which photography was featured; use of colour, aesthetically pleasing layouts, creative use of drawn art and graphics; the inclusion

¹ Philip Roth *The Plot Against America: A Novel* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) p. 100

of consumer news; the inclusion of radio programming information and a refusal to carry advertising through most of its history. *PM* was a newspaper that numbered both the child-rearing guru Dr. Spock and the creator of *The Cat in the Hat*, Dr. Seuss, among its contributors and its innovative character owed much to Ralph Ingersoll, who had previously worked on the Henry Luce magazine empire's *Fortune* and *Life* titles. Politically *PM* was 'a fighting liberal crusader' supporting US entry into a war to defeat fascism and advocating the rights of trade unionists, Jews and blacks. Amidst a generally hostile press, the paper was an ardent supporter of Roosevelt, a figure it tended to idealise because, as Milkman notes, while the President was 'capable of militant rhetoric... he was as skilful in maintaining alliances with old-style political bosses in Democratic urban and southern power bases'².

The Plot Against America has no Irish-American characters but the memory the narrator's mother has of growing up Jewish in an Elizabeth 'dominated by the Irish working class and their politicians and the tightly knit parish life that revolved around the town's many churches' plays an important role in her husband's decision to pass up a work promotion that would mean moving out of the family's overwhelmingly Jewish Newark neighbourhood³. The only reference to the Irish in Milkman's history of *PM* is made in relation to the ambivalent position that Jews occupied in 1940s New York - 'Young Christian Front hoodlums in the German, Irish and Italian communities were fond of Jew-bashing: the genteel Protestant establishment maintained its white Christian exclusivity with written and unwritten quotas on jobs, housing and educational opportunities'⁴. Neither the novelist nor the historian refers to Ireland's wartime neutrality although *PM*'s interventions on this issue have registered in Irish treatments of the period. Thus T. Ryle Dwyer cites *PM* in relation to charges of distortion, misrepresentation and rumour mongering levelled broadly against the American press and specifically refers to 'a particularly inflammatory series of articles' *PM* published in March 1944⁵. These articles prompted a strong Irish official response which, along with part of *PM*'s rejoinder, has been quoted by Dermot Keogh⁶. However, the

² Paul Milkman *PM: A New Deal in Journalism, 1940-48* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997) p. 3

³ Philip Roth op. cit. pp. 8-9

⁴ Paul Milkman op. cit. pp. 146-147

⁵ T. Ryle Dwyer *Irish Neutrality and the USA, 1939-47* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977) pp. 96-97 and 119

⁶ Dermot Keogh *Jews in twentieth-century Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998) pp. 181-182

breadth of the context within which Keogh presents this material does not accommodate its full consideration. This paper revisits PM's wartime exchange with Irish officialdom in order to provide an account of greater depth.

Cables between New York and Dublin

On 14 March 1944 the Irish Consul-General in New York, Leo McCauley, sent three cables to the Department of External Affairs in Dublin. The first read:

Rabid debate on Irish developments taking place Saturday. One of the speakers against Ireland is Michael Sayers described as Irish journalist. Understand that he is not of Irish stock and that father was an Army contractor in Dublin. Please cable details regarding son immediately, including original name and nationality of father.

According to the second:

"P.M." prints the first of a series of four articles by Michael Sayers, described as an Irish journalist. His article is captioned "Truth about Nazi espionage in Eire – Irish terrorists work directly under Hitler's orders". It states that Axis espionage has flourished on Irish soil since the first days of the war and De Valera knows it. The article describes the German Legation as having spy courier system working across border, mentions Francis Stuart as broadcasting Nazi propaganda from Berlin, his wife's arrest, and arrest of Henry Lunberg with text of despatch found on him addressed to Director of Intelligence, Northern Command, enquiring strength British and American forces. It also gives details of Hayes incidents and activities of Sean Russell.

While the third stated:

"P.M." announces next three articles by Sayers will deal with 'rise of Anti-Semitic Fifth Column in Eire'. Suggest you obtain urgently for publication here statement from Jewish leader and community in Ireland.

The first response from Dublin came on 16 March when a cable provided sketchy details on Sayers and his background - 'Father is Jew born in Russia. Lived for some years in Dublin now in London. Michael born Dublin, was in T.C.D. 1937, then went to England'. On the

following day, St. Patrick's Day, a much longer cable containing statements from the Jewish Representative Council and from Fianna Fail T.D. Robert Briscoe was sent to New York. Over the names of fourteen signatories, the Council statement read:

The Jewish Representative Council of Eire repudiate as false irresponsible and mischievous any suggestion that the government of this country is anti-Semitic or that there is any organised anti-Semitic movement in Eire. The Jewish community live and have always lived on terms of closest friendship with their fellow Irish citizens. Freedom to practice their religion is specifically guaranteed in the Irish Constitution. No Irish Government has ever discriminated between Jew and Non-Jew.

That of Robert Briscoe read:

As a member of the Irish parliament and as a practicing adherent of the Jewish faith who has represented for seventeen years a Dublin constituency ninety seven per cent Roman Catholic I deny emphatically that the people or the present or any Government of Ireland are or have ever been anti-Semitic. This statement is confirmed by the prompt repudiation of the calumny by the Jewish Representative Council of Eire composed of distinguished Irish citizens representing the entire Jewish community of Eire. I should like to add that the Jewish community in Eire are taking their full share in the Defence and auxiliary Defence Forces of the country and that they wholeheartedly support the Government's policy of neutrality.

These statements were published in a number of New York Irish or Catholic papers and also, on 25 March, by *PM* which, according to the Consul-General, responded to them in the following terms:

P.M. repudiates as false, irresponsible and mischievous any suggestion that it imputed official anti-Semitic bias to the De Valera Government but P.M. repudiates as false, irresponsible and mischievous any denial that there is an organised anti-Semitic movement in Eire. There is, in spite of the fact – as P.M. pointedly observed – that anti-Semitism never existed in Ireland until the Nazis found a few accomplices there. What P.M.'s article said - and what cannot be contradicted – is that the Germans have had some success in spreading the virus of anti-Semitism in Ireland with the help of such elements as General O'Duffy's Irish Fascist Party which has adopted a Nazi-inspired 'Jewish peril' line and of Fr. Denis Fahey, author of anti-Semitic tracts taken

partly from Nazi propaganda. Fahey and his Christocrats have had the support of Charles G. Coughlin. P.M. did not say that the Dail (Eire's Parliament) was anti-Semitic, but it did say, because it is a fact, that the Dail has its Rankin element.

A final line in the cable conveying this information to the Department of External Affairs in Dublin reads: 'Irish Loan sold New York Exchange today at 99% unchanged'⁷. A postscript to the affair was added when a 14 September 1944 letter to Lennox Robinson of the Abbey Theatre from Patrick Mahony on Prince George Hotel, New York notepaper passed through the Irish postal censorship. This begins by asking Robinson about plays or stories that might be sent over for sale to the Hollywood film industry – 'I can get them read at once by people like Schenk and other Yids out there'. The letter then continues:

Do you happen to be in touch with Iseult Gonne? If so you might tell her that she has an open and shut case for libel against a nasty rag called P.M. in this city (165 Duane St.) They claimed that she had been jailed for pro-Nazi machinations and as I understand she was merely reprimanded for a very minor breach in defense regulations. This was stated in the work of an Irish-Jew called Michael Sayers whom you may know and whose work is always replete with false assertions. The date of the piece was March 14, 1944. I think she could get at least fifty thousand damages if she cares to press the case and I think she should. It is quite easy to invoke the foreign court procedure and any lawyer would take it on a contingency fee.⁸

On 9 November Colonel Dan Bryan, head of G2 (Army Intelligence) sent a copy of this letter to Joseph Walshe, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs commenting that 'Sayers is a gentlemen who is in our black books and though I hold no brief for Iseult Stuart I would not be opposed to giving her a helping hand in any action she may consider taking against Sayers'. A handwritten postscript adds that 'he is the Jew that was syndicating anti-Irish

⁷ Cables Hibernia to Estero 14 March 1944; Cables Estero to Hibernia 16 March 1944 and 17 March 1944; Cables Hibernia to Estero 24 March 1944 and 25 March 1944 (National Archives of Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs P90, Allegation By US Journal "PM" Re "Organised Anti-Semitic" Movement in Ireland (Michael Sayers) 1944)

⁸ Copy of Patrick Mahony, Prince George Hotel, New York to Lennox Robinson 14 September 1944 (Ibid.) Mahony adds in a postscript "the opulent Marshall Field owns P.M."

articles re Espionage in Ireland during the US note crisis. His father would appear to be in London and to be a friend of Deputy Briscoe'.⁹

The Department of External Affairs file containing the material quoted above is entitled 'Allegation by US Journal "PM" Re "Organised Anti-Semitic" Movement in Ireland (Michael Sayers) 1944' but the contents of the file range more widely in subject matter and time. The earliest item again involves wartime postal censorship and the correspondence of another Irish literary figure, Monk Gibbon. The letter copied in this case was a reply he had written on 29 February 1944 to an inquiry from the Jewish Defence Committee in London. Here he concludes that 'I think the very most that could be said – if that even – is that they [the Jews] are vaguely unpopular but there is absolutely no general attitude of intolerance towards them'. There had been 'some talk about a pamphlet eighteen months or so ago' but he had not seen it and could provide no information about it apart from the impression that it did not 'make a very great stir'.¹⁰

Teaching in a school in Bray, Gibbon was not perhaps the best placed of informants. Colonel Bryan of G2 had a superior vantage point and in January 1945 in another letter in the file with no connection to the Sayers articles in *PM*, he observed to Joseph Walshe that 'writing with due recognition that the Jewish problem is a very thorny and contentious one and that accusations of Anti-Semitism are easily aroused, I wish to state that the extent to which Dublin is becoming what may be described as Jew-conscious is frequently coming to the notice of this Branch'.¹¹ An influx of Jews would, he predicts, follow any relaxation of the control on aliens entering Ireland. When the war ended De Valera sought to initiate a 'positive and liberal' policy on the admission of refugees but the agencies exercising day-to-day control over entry frustrated this by adhering to existing highly restrictive practices.¹² Walshe himself was to provide the striking testimony regarding the prevalence of anti-Semitic attitudes in Ireland when, having given up the position of Department Secretary to become Irish Ambassador to the Holy See, he reported from Rome in October 1946 on his

⁹ Colonel Dan Bryan to Joseph Walshe 9 November 1944 (Ibid.)

¹⁰ Copy of W.M. Gibbon to Jewish Defence League 22 February 1944 (Ibid.)

¹¹ Colonel Dan Bryan to Joseph Walshe 6 January 1945 (Ibid.)

¹² Dermot Keogh op. cit, chapters 5-7: Eunan O'Halpin *Defending Ireland: The Irish State and Its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 293-295

meetings with `a large number of Irish priests and nuns visiting Rome for the purpose of their Orders, in most cases to elect a new Superior General':

All of them without exception spoke in terms of the highest praise of the Taoiseach and the Government and of the manner in which difficulties were being surmounted and real progress achieved... Speaking of the difficulties facing the Government, they were unanimous in thinking that something ought to be done to prevent the jews buying property and starting or acquiring businesses in Ireland. There was a general conviction that the jewish influence is in the last analysis anti-christian and anti-national and consequently detrimental to the revival of an Irish cultural and religious civilisation. Some of them say that jewish materialism encourages communism (not an unusual view here).

Walshe was sure `that the Taoiseach would wish me to pass on these views of Irish men and women holding the highest position in their respective orders' but his successor as Department Secretary, Frederick Boland, decided that the letter should not be shown to De Valera.¹³

Clashing Commitments

Ralph Ingersoll encapsulated *PM's* identity in the phrase `we are against people who push other people around'. According to Paul Milkman `on the great issues of the day the paper was remarkably consistent, maintaining an impassioned antifascist, prolabor, left-liberal New Deal outlook'.¹⁴ When the USA became a belligerent in late 1941 *PM* did not pull its punches in deference to a national war effort it strongly supported. For example, the paper extensively covered a serious outbreak of white-on-black violence in Detroit in 1943 which was exploited for propaganda purposes by Japanese radio. Nine pages of Detroit pictures were printed in *PM*, the complicity of the local police was exposed and the actions of politicians and government agencies strongly criticised.¹⁵

¹³ Joseph Walshe to Frederick Boland 17 October 1946, (National Archives of Ireland Department of Foreign Affairs 313/6 Confidential Reports from Vatican Embassy (from 21st February 1945 - 17th July 1953))

¹⁴ Paul Milkman op. cit. pp. 37-38 and 59

¹⁵ Paul Milkman op. cit.p.152-153

A rather different outlook encapsulation was provided by Joseph Walshe in a diplomatic cable sent from Dublin to Ottawa in January 1941 – ‘small nations like Ireland do not and cannot assume role of defenders of just causes except their own’.¹⁶ For the state Walshe served an all-pervasive system of emergency censorship became ‘neutrality’s backbone’:

On the one level, it operated as an internal security mechanism in the traditional sense, giving the authorities an important informative and preventative weapon in the maintenance of political, military and economic security, supplementing the intelligence work of G2 (which carried out its own covert censorship activities). At the same time it was central to the public presentation of impartiality by denying belligerents ‘due cause’ or domestic partisans any excuse or encouragement to create trouble for the state or its policy; the aim was to ‘keep the temperature down’, both internally and between Ireland and the belligerents. A linked objective was the unity of the population by the suppression of anything that might prove divisive or present a threat to public order. War news was ‘neutralised’ (including suppression of reports of the concentration camps); newsreels were banned; children’s games were seized; the expressions of opinions on the war, neutrality and much else of vital importance, in both public media and private communications, was disallowed.¹⁷

As we have seen, Michael Sayers’ articles in PM were assailed both at the time and later as being ‘replete with false assertions’, ‘anti-Irish’ and ‘inflammatory’. Yet, as synthesised in the New York Consul-General’s cable, the one dealing with espionage was hardly factually inaccurate. Francis Stuart and other Irish people were making German radio broadcasts.¹⁸ Stuart’s wife Iseult (the daughter of Maud Gonne) was tried on a charge of harbouring a person unknown who threatened the security of the state in July 1940. Henry Lundbourg, a restaurant car attendant on the Great Northern Railway between Dublin and Belfast, was in possession of letters indicating that the clandestine Irish Republican Army (IRA) was engaged in gathering information on Allied forces within Northern Ireland when he was

¹⁶ Ronan Fanning *et al.* (Eds.) *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy Volume VI, 1939-41* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008) Joseph Walshe to John Hearne 1 January 1941, Document No. 377, p. 422

¹⁷ Donal O’Drisceoil *Censorship in Ireland, 1939-45: Neutrality, Politics and Society* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996) p. 6

¹⁸ Brendan Barrington (Ed.) *The Wartime Broadcasts of Francis Stuart 1942-44* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000); David O’Donoghue *Hitler’s Irish Voices: The Story of German Radio’s Wartime Irish Service* (Belfast: Beyond The Pale Publications, 1998).

arrested in Belfast in February 1942.¹⁹ The IRA's Chief of Staff when it launched a bombing campaign in Britain early in 1939, Sean Russell was secretly transported from the USA to Germany in April 1940 and later in the same year died on board a U-boat that was to have landed him in Ireland. The successor to Russell as IRA Chief of Staff, Stephen Hayes, was suspected by some of his comrades of being a traitor. In June 1941 these men abducted him and extracted a 'confession', parts of which were circulated by the IRA after Hayes managed to escape from its custody into that of the Gardai. This document contained, among other things, details of contacts that had taken place between Irish republicans and German military intelligence agents.²⁰ Regarding Sayers' broader claim that the German Legation had a 'spy courier system working across border' Eunan O'Halpin has recently offered a corrective to the widespread view that German legation played no significant intelligence role, concluding on the basis of recently released files that the German minister in Dublin, Eduard Hempel, had 'consistently passed on as much war information as could be obtained incidentally, had encouraged pro-Nazi fringe groups, had intrigued with a senior Irish army officer, had first denied possession of a secret transmitter and had then broken undertakings to the Irish not to operate it again, and had indirectly assisted German agents sent to Ireland'.²¹

In relation to the existence of an organised anti-Semitic movement in Ireland, PM's charges were more of an understatement than an overstatement. Neither PM's concession that there was no 'official anti-Semitic bias' in Ireland nor the Jewish Representative Council statement that 'no Irish Government has ever discriminated between Jew and Non-Jew' tally with what is now known about the parameters within which Irish immigration policy operated before and after the war.²² Perhaps understandable in a wartime context, PM's

¹⁹ Mark Hull *Irish Secrets: German Espionage in Ireland, 1939-1945* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003) p. 247

²⁰ J. Bowyer Bell *The Secret Army: The IRA Third Edition* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1997) pp. 189-212; David O'Donoghue *The Devil's Deal: The IRA, Nazi Germany and the Double Life of Jim O'Donovan* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2010) pp. 167-177

²¹ Eunan O'Halpin *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality During the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 31-32

²² Katrina Goldstone "'Benevolent Helpfulness'? Ireland and the International Reaction to Jewish Refugees, 1933-9" in Michael Kennedy and J.M. Skelly (Eds.) *Irish Foreign Policy, 1916-1966: From Independence to Internationalism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000) pp.116-136; Dermot Keogh op. cit, chapters 5-7

claim that 'anti—Semitism never existed in Ireland until the Nazis found a few accomplices there' does not stand up to any scrutiny.²³

What then of the three elements indicted for helping the Germans to spread the virus of anti-Semitism in Ireland? Eoin O'Duffy's biographer concludes that 'he was an unprincipled opportunist rather than a dedicated anti-Semite' but that 'the more anti-Semitism dominated international fascism the more this was reflected by his rhetoric'.²⁴ By 1944 O'Duffy was a spent force politically and, while in the war years there was certainly a (closely monitored) 'pro-Axis underground'²⁵, there was no Irish Fascist Party. During these years O'Duffy, who died in November 1944, mixed caution with intrigue - 'a Quisling in waiting, while being careful to deny the authorities a reason to intern him (the harsh environment of the Curragh camp being no place for an ailing alcoholic)'.²⁶

Fr. Denis Fahey, a professor at the Holy Ghost order's Kimmage Manor seminary, was a prolific author of anti-Semitic books although this aspect of his work derives from an older right-wing Catholic tendency to amalgamate Protestantism, Liberalism, Freemasonry, Socialism, Communism and Judaism into a single force bent on the destruction of the church rather than from Nazism. The connection that *PM* noted between Fahey and Fr. Charles Coughlin, a Detroit-based priest whose radio programme built up a large audience across the USA from the late 1920s, was later to be explored in depth by Marie Christine Athans.²⁷ Coughlin had supported Roosevelt in the 1932 presidential election but in 1936 he opposed the President and backed a third party candidate who polled poorly. In opposition to Roosevelt he launched two movements, with the National Union for Social Justice being superseded in 1938 by the Christian Front. By 1938 anti-Semitism had come to the fore in his broadcasts and writings, he was making frequent reference to Fahey's works to support his claims and the two priests then began a correspondence that continued up to Fahey's death in 1954. Rather than submit to editorial controls instituted by a new industry self-

²³ Gerald Moore *Anti-Semitism in Ireland* (Ulster Polytechnic PhD, 1984)

²⁴ Fearghal McGarry *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 254

²⁵ R.M. Douglas "The Pro-Axis Underground in Ireland, 1939-1942" *Historical Journal* Vol. 44, No. 4, 2006, pp. 1153-1183

²⁶ Fearghal McGarry op. cit. p. 333

²⁷ Mary Christine Athans *The Coughlin-Fahey Connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., and Religious Anti-Semitism in the United States, 1938-1954* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991)

regulation code, Coughlin withdrew from radio broadcasting in 1940.²⁸ In the press *Social Justice* continued to air his views until the entry of the USA into the World War led to its suppression in 1942. From then until his death in 1979, Coughlin was 'silenced' by his ecclesiastical superiors but, amidst an extensive 'brown scare' targeting isolationist or pro-Axis elements in the USA, he escaped prosecution by the state authorities.²⁹ *PM* can claim credit for the speed with which moves to suppress Coughlin's propaganda were instituted after the entry of the USA into the war and the paper also led the way in exposing the extensive violence against Jews in Boston and New York for which mainly Irish-American adherents of the Christian Front continued to be responsible throughout the war years.³⁰

A feature of US commentaries on Fr. Coughlin and his followers both before and after US entry into the war was the claim that the IRA on both sides of the Atlantic was under his influence. An American Council on Public Affairs pamphlet in 1940 interwove the alleged use of IRA bomb-making techniques by New York Christian Front members arrested on conspiracy charges and the detention in London of a suspected IRA bomber allegedly identified through an intercepted communication to Christian Front headquarters in New York from the Ministry of Propaganda in Berlin to present 'Berlin-Dublin-New York' as 'international seats of infection for a festering boil on the neck of the nation'.³¹ In 1943 an article in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* claimed that 'to Fr. Coughlin look for intellectual guidance the Irish Republican Army, the Clan-na-Gael and similar Irish groups in this country and even in Eire'. Supporting the 'even in Eire' claim was

²⁸ James A. Brown "Selling Airtime for Controversy: NAB Self-Regulation and Father Coughlin" *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, pp. 199-224

²⁹ "In the Spring of 1942, emissaries from the Roosevelt administration warned Bishop Edward Mooney of Detroit that the Justice Department was considering filing charges against Coughlin unless he withdrew from all political activities. Mooney ordered his subordinate to retire from public life or face defrockment. Coughlin complied with this ultimatum and quietly lived out the rest of his days out of the public eye" Francis McDonnell *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 39

³⁰ Paul Milkman op. cit pp. 78-79; Stephen H. Norwood "Marauding Youth and the Christian Front: Antisemitic Violence in Boston and New York During World War II" *American Jewish History* Vol. 91, No. 2, 2003, pp. 233-267

³¹ Theodore Irwin *Inside the Christian Front* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1940) pp. 2-3

a footnote that referenced a Michael Sayers piece entitled “Swastika over the Shamrock?” published in *The Hour* in July 1939.³²

What *PM* termed a ‘Rankin element’ was named after a Mississippi congressman notorious for his racial supremacist and anti-Semitic statements. The members of the Dail who fitted this description were limited in number due to the failure of the parties spawned by the pro-Axis underground – Ailtirí na hAisèirghe (Architects of the Resurrection) and People’s National Party – either to contest elections or to get any candidates elected to positions higher than that of local councillor. The label best applied to Oliver J. Flanagan who was elected as a Monetary Reform Party candidate in the 1943 general election and denounced Jews in his maiden Dail speech. Flanagan was influenced by, and corresponded with, Fr. Fahey.³³ To Flanagan might be added Clann na Talmhan, a small farmer protest party that won about 10 per cent of the vote in both the 1943 and 1944 general elections. But Jews were only one among many targets of the Clann’s bilious rhetoric : as Eunan O’Halpin observes, while ‘it adopted some lines of argument which had Nazi resonances... it was equally hostile to metropolitan Ireland, to civil servants, to taxation, and to all non-rural public expenditure’.³⁴

What particularly exercised the Dublin authorities about the Sayers articles in *PM* was probably not their content but the timing of their appearance in the midst of the American Note Crisis. Presented on 21 February 1944 in the name of Secretary of State Cordell Hull, this Note requested that ‘the Irish Government take appropriate steps for the recall of the German and Japanese representatives in Ireland... whose presence in Ireland must inevitably be regarded as constituting a danger to the lives of Allied soldiers and the success of Allied military operations’. Refusing to comply, the Irish government in early March published the terms of the Note and placed their defence forces on high alert in anticipation of a possible Allied incursion. In Britain and the USA disclosure of the diplomatic exchange prompted a fresh wave of press attacks on the Irish neutrality policy of which the mid-

³² Alfred McClung Lee “Subversive Individuals of Minority Status” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 223, 1943, p. 165

³³ Dermot Keogh op.cit. pp. 172-173

³⁴ Eunan O’Halpin *Spying on Ireland* p. 223

March Sayers articles in *PM* effectively formed a part and to which – in the British cases – the Irish press censor responded punitively in some instances.³⁵

By November 1944 the tensions and restrictions of that year's Spring had eased significantly but perhaps it is not surprising that Colonel Bryan of G2 should still have Michael Sayers in 'our black books'. Yet his suggestion that an official 'helping hand' might be given to a libel action against *PM* by Iseult Stuart remains extraordinary. Across the Atlantic, Patrick Mahony might believe that Iseult Stuart's actions constituted a very 'minor breach in defense regulations' but Colonel Bryan would have known that when Herman Goertz, a German agent who landed by parachute in May 1940, made his way to Stuart's home in Wicklow his presence was not disclosed to the Irish authorities. Instead he was sheltered, provided with fresh clothes and a senior IRA figure, James O'Donovan, was contacted to collect him. A police raid on a Dublin 'safe house' in which the IRA had placed him failed to capture Goertz but it did provide evidence that a German spy was at large and that he had been assisted since his arrival by Mrs. Stuart. This set in train her detention, trial and acquittal ('despite' - according to Mark Hull - 'her clear guilt').³⁶ Scholars remain divided as whether Iseult Stuart was an apolitical person in this instance haplessly thrust into a compromising position by the action of her absent (in Berlin) and estranged husband, Francis, or someone with more than social connections through the Gonne McBride clan with German Minister Eduard Hempel. As she was not interned by authorities with no compunction about applying this power to women suspected of subversion, it may be inferred that the government of the day leaned towards the former view. That a libel action she might bring in a wartime US court could be regarded in Ireland as having some prospect of success indicates the gulf between prevailing attitudes in the two countries at the time.

Postscript: The Death of PM and the emergence of Fiat

The end of the war was fairly quickly followed by *PM*'s demise. Although changes of ownership and name would postpone the end for a time, Milkman points to election day in November 1946 as the crucial date upon which the paper abandoned its policy of not accepting advertising just as the Republicans were taking control of both houses of Congress

³⁵ Donal O'Drisceoil op. cit. pp. 198-199

³⁶ Mark Hull op. cit p. 95; see also David O'Donoghue *The Devil's Deal* pp. 171-172

- 'the dream of the independent, liberal paper died on precisely the day Americans forswore liberalism (and banished antifascism forever)'.³⁷ In Ireland the termination of the wartime press censorship brought the end of a blanket policy aiming to 'keep the temperature down' which had suppressed anti-Semitic publications.³⁸ By the Summer of 1946, prompted by the Department of Industry and Commerce which wanted to know how it was obtaining severely rationed newsprint, a new paper was being investigated by the Gardai who found it 'extremely difficult to get exact information of the personnel of the group responsible for issue of "Fiat"'.³⁹ By October 1948 Frederick Boland in External Affairs was sending Colonel Bryan of G2 a copy and asking 'have you any idea who is behind this periodical?' - 'you will notice that it attacks the Marshall Plan describing it as an instrument of "the Judaeo-Masonic forces of the Western Hemisphere" but that, on the other hand, it begins with an excerpt from a book by the Reverend Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp.'. In his reply, Colonel Bryan describes Fiat as being 'issued by a Study Group of current social affairs which operates under the auspices of the Holy Ghost Fathers':

Personally I feel that the driving force behind this activity is Father Fahey. He has written a book at some period on the influence of the Jews on World Affairs... During the last war Father Fahey was very perturbed because important Nazi propagandists used some of his writings as propaganda against the Jews for their own purposes. He probably does not want somewhat similar use to be made by the Communists of "Fiat"⁴⁰

By his own account, contained in letters he sent to Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin in November 1947, Fr. Fahey was publishing new – *The Tragedy of James Connolly*⁴¹ - or revised – *The Rulers of Russia and The Russian Farmers*⁴² - material with the aim of counteracting Communist propaganda. He was also reviving his efforts to bring out a work

³⁷ Paul Milkman op. cit p. 201

³⁸ Donal O'Drisceoil op. cit. pp.185-187 and p. 220

³⁹ Garda reports (National Archives of Ireland, Department of Justice JUS/8/945 Fiat (Spanish Newsletter) 11 Lr. Abbey Street Dublin)

⁴⁰ Frederick Boland to Colonel Dan Bryan 1 October 1948, Colonel Dan Bryan to Frederick Boland 8 October 1948 (National Archives of Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs Foreign Affairs A55/I Communist Activities in Ireland)

⁴¹ Denis Fahey *The Tragedy of James Connolly* (Cork: Forum Press, 1947)

⁴² Denis Fahey *The Rulers of Russia and The Russian Farmers* (Thurles and Dublin: "The Tipperary Star" and Holy Ghost Missionary College, Kimmage, 1948)

which had failed to get through the ecclesiastical censorship process in several Irish dioceses. To *The Kingship of Christ and the Conversion of the Jewish Nation*⁴³ 'I want to add on two or three chapters... and to offer it to a friendly publisher in England'. This book would assert the validity of Fahey's opposition to what he termed Jewish Naturalism in the face of a general post-Nazi reaction against anti-Semitism:

For a good many years, I have seen that a number of Catholic writers are making the mistake of not asserting the integral Rights of Our Lord and are at the same time accepting the Jewish interpretation of Anti-Semitism, namely any form of opposition to the Jewish nation. That is leading to deplorable results. I saw too, in the early years of the war, that the plan was to work up propaganda about the excesses of racial hatred in Germany and to use the feeling thus generated to crush any and every form of opposition to the preparations for the natural messias. That plan is being pushed forward. I do not know if Your Grace has seen that a priest's Passion Sermon was banned in American-occupied Germany as Anti-Semitic. The item did not appear in the Irish newspapers. You may not have seen either that the Commission for the denazification of Germany condemned all the members of the cast of the Oberammergau Passion Play except Pontius Pilate and Judas. I have read over the text of one of the Bills against Anti-Semitism, introduced in the United States. Its terms could be extended to suppress Holy Week, especially Good Friday, and even the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. I want to point out these dangers and others, and I shall be grateful if you will enable me to lift my head again and continue my work for Christ the King. (Emphasis in original)⁴⁴

By the end of the 1940s Fr. Fahey's study group had emerged into the open as Maria Duce, a movement focussed mainly on changing the Irish Constitution's religious provisions to acknowledge the Catholic Church as the 'one true church' and carrying out aggressive 'anti-

⁴³ This book was eventually published in Ireland in 1953 but doubt has been cast on the validity of the Diocese of Ferns Imprimatur it carries – see Marie Christine Athans op. cit p.71; J. Anthony Gaughan *Alfred O'Rahilly 3 Controversialist Part 2, Catholic Apologist* (Dublin: Kingdom Books, 1993) pp. 199-200; Enda Delaney "Political Catholicism in Post-War Ireland: Revd. Denis Fahey and Maria Duce, 1945-54" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 52, No.3, 2001, pp. 496-497

⁴⁴ Father Denis Fahey to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid 11 November 1947 (Dublin Diocesan Archives McQuaid Papers AB8/B/XXI/80/54 Lay Organisations Maria Duce)

communist' picketing of cinemas and theatres.⁴⁵ This was, in the words of a 1952 Department of External Affairs minute, 'an energetic, rather intolerant organisation tinged with anti-Semitism'.⁴⁶ Left to their own devices by the state and at first indulged but later isolated by the church authorities, Father Fahey's followers sustained an anti-Semitic presence in the Irish press and on the Irish streets into the early 1960s.

⁴⁵ Enda Delaney "Political Catholicism in Post-War Ireland" op.cit.: Enda Delaney "Anti-Communism in Mid-Twentieth Century Ireland" *English Historical Review* Vol. CXXVI, No. 521, 2011, pp. 878-903

⁴⁶ Minute 3 December 1952 (National Archives of Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs 380/10 Maria Duce Organisation)