

Fianna Fáil, the *Irish Press* and radio
broadcasting 1926 – 1939.

A voice for the people or party propaganda?

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ABSTRACT

Fianna Fáil was formally launched on 16 May 1926 in response to a desire among some members of the Free State population for a political party which represented those disenchanted with republican abstentionism and government austerity. Fianna Fáil aimed to win over such voters, in particular small farmers, farm labourers and the urban working class. They quickly succeeded in offering the electorate a political and cultural alternative to both Cumann na nGaedheal and the Labour party gaining power in 1932.

From its first issue on 5 September 1931, the *Irish Press* newspaper provided Fianna Fáil with a voice in the media. An innovative paper, the *Irish Press*, reflected the needs and interests of its readers especially through its coverage of Gaelic games and culture.

Radio broadcasting during the early years of the Irish Free State was operated directly by the State. Once Fianna Fáil came to power in 1932 they instigated changes to radio broadcasting content which reflected listeners' desires. With such changes came renewed debate on whether broadcasting could continue to be considered a source of nation building or merely an instrument of government propaganda.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE The Origins of Fianna Fáil.....	8
CHAPTER TWO Establishing the <i>Irish Press</i>	28
CHAPTER THREE The Civic Duty of Radio	49
CHAPTER FOUR Radio Broadcasting and Nation Building in the Irish Free State during the 1920s and 1930s.....	68
CONCLUSION.....	85

INTRODUCTION

What were the social contexts which led to the foundation of Fianna Fáil? How important was the *Irish Press* to the fledgling party? Did the party overly influence programming on radio to gain power in 1932 and to what extent was radio broadcasting in the Free State reflective of international trends relating to nationalist ideologies? Did the *Irish Press* and radio broadcasting communicate societal desires or did they merely echo governmental ambitions? Were the *Irish Press* and radio broadcasting a voice for the people or propaganda? This dissertation aims to investigate the relationship between Fianna Fáil, the *Irish Press* and radio broadcasting in the years between 1926 and 1939. It seeks to examine the social and political contexts in which Fianna Fáil was founded and to what extent media, in the form of the *Irish Press* and radio broadcasting were used by the party for the purposes of defining, expressing or projecting party ambition. Radio broadcasting will also be considered in the context of the 1920s and 1930s, when the civic responsibilities of broadcasting were debated nationally and internationally.

The methodology used was that of historical inquiry and historical narrative, where a topic was selected within a specific time period and initially examined through a series of general questions. The dissertation is set within the framework of contemporary opinion. Research through examination of primary sources revealed beliefs and attitudes while the secondary sources used enabled a contextual overview. From this research more detailed questions were developed until the core research question became apparent. The time frame

chosen spans the period from the foundation of Fianna Fáil in 1926 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 when censorship was rigorously enforced on all Irish media under the Emergency Powers Act 1939.

The primary sources of information regarding these various correlations are the official parliamentary reports of Dáil Éireann and of Seanad Éireann where government and opposition representatives debated how best to use radio broadcasting. Departmental, personal and party attitudes towards radio broadcasting in particular and media in general are discernible, however nuanced, within these records. The Fianna Fáil Archive at University College Dublin holds detailed information on the party's inception, its ideals, aims, procedures and voter base. The files held in the archive were used to gain an understanding of the contemporary issues which impacted on Fianna Fáil, for example letters between Seán Lemass and Éamon de Valera on the need for a press to further party ambition. Relevant documents from both the Department of Post and Telegraphs and the Department of Finance have been displaced across different repositories and commercial institutions making research difficult. Similarly, the unavailability of access to the archives of Radio Teilifís Éireann (R.T.E.) makes gathering research difficult.

Periodicals and newspapers, regional and national, daily and weekly provide contemporary interpretations and attitudes towards the changing political climate of the period and towards resultant government policies on media and broadcasting. Of particular interest for this study were *The Irish Radio Review* and *The Irish Radio Journal* both of which were founded in the mid-1920s and copies of which are held in the National Library. Editorial

content and subsequent debate through the letters pages highlight the issues which surrounded radio broadcasting throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These issues centred on how broadcasting could be used as an educational tool; what constituted entertainment; who decided on programming content and ultimately who was radio broadcasting for – the public or the government of the day? Articles by international correspondents reiterate these themes strengthening the premise that such topics were debated worldwide.

The private papers of Frank Gallagher, first editor of the *Irish Press*, held in the National Library greatly enhanced research into both the founding of the Fianna Fáil party and its relationship to the *Irish Press*. The personal papers of Thomas Barton and Joseph McGarrity which are held in the National Library, also give insight into the early years of Fianna Fáil, *The Nation*, and the *Irish Press*. Thomas Joseph (T. J.) Kiernan's papers, which are also held at the National Library, contain copies of and notes on his speeches regarding broadcasting and his ambitions for the national radio station.

Gallagher's and Kiernan's papers have been used in detail by Rex Cathcart, John Horgan, Mark O'Brien and Richard Pine to examine the development of media, both the press and radio, in the early years of the Irish Free State. Cathcart, Horgan and Pine's works also include the development of the press and radio broadcasting in Northern Ireland.

The 1920s were a formative decade for Ireland politically and economically. How the emergent state promoted self-representation is considered throughout the essays edited by Mel Farrell, Jason Knirck and Ciara Meehan in *A Formative Decade: Ireland in the 1920s*. This theme of

representation is further addressed in *A new history of Ireland*, vii: *Ireland 1921-1948* edited by J. R. Hill which provides, in a single volume survey of twentieth-century Ireland, the most comprehensive coverage of political, economic, social and cultural developments, north and south, and offers a specific chapter on media in twentieth century Ireland and two chapters on music as a nation building medium. The chapter on media by Rex Cathcart and Michael Muldoon, titled 'The mass media in twentieth-century Ireland' provides a concise reading of the development of mass media – newspapers, cinema, and radio. Likewise, the chapters on music, the first by Joseph R. Ryan, titled 'Music in independent Ireland since 1921', and the second by Roy Johnston on 'Music in Northern Ireland since 1921' also present accounts of musical activity in radio broadcasting.

Drawing on a wide range of contemporary sources *Ireland in the 1930s*, edited by Joost Augusteijn gives a comprehensive reading of an often overlooked period in Irish history. For the purposes of this study, Elizabeth Russell's essay 'Holy crosses, guns and roses: themes in popular reading material' offers insights into what people wished to read as opposed to what the ruling elites considered suitable to read. Regarding Irish language policies within the period, Adrian Kelly's essay 'Cultural imperatives: the Irish language revival and the education system' examines the continued attempts to force an unwilling population to speak Irish on a day-to-day basis.

The most comprehensive study of the founding of Fianna Fáil and its subsequent rise to power is Richard Dunphy's *The Making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland 1923-48*. This detailed work, offers not only a political context for

the party's existence but also the social and economic reasons. Together with Mark O'Brien's *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press: The Truth in the News* both publications present how the party portrayed its aims and ambitions, how it generated loyalty among its electorate and how it expanded its voter base from that of a predominately rural and urban working class preference to one which included an emerging business class. Timothy M. O'Neill's insightful essay 'Reframing the Republic: Republican Socioeconomic thought and the Road to Fianna Fáil 1923-1927' in *A Formative Decade: Ireland in the 1920s* iterates and expands upon Dunphy's social and economic premise. John Horgan's work *Irish Media: A Critical History since 1922* provides two chapters 'The new order, 1922-31' and 'Affairs of state, 1931-47' which outline the reasons for Fianna Fáil establishing the *Irish Press* in 1931. The latter chapter presents the party's principal objective to be the consolidation of electoral support while also maintaining journalistic credibility among its readers.

There has been a significant growth in the study of media history and radio broadcasting history since the early 1990s. How governments worldwide questioned and debated the responsibilities of radio broadcasting in particular during the inter-war period when financial crises, rising unemployment and political scepticism helped create widespread social unrest is the focus of critical work by media historians David Goodman, Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio.¹

¹ David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2011); Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational history of British and American Broadcasting* (London, 2011); Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis, 2005).

In an Irish context, Richard Pine outlines the formation of radio broadcasting and examines the relationship between music, broadcasting and nation building from 1926 in *Music and Broadcasting in Ireland*. This work is largely concerned with the development of live performance by the national broadcasting service, and makes extensive use of currently inaccessible primary source material from the R.T.É. Archive relating to programming, staffing and editorial decisions. Maurice Gorham's work *Forty Years in Irish Broadcasting* presents an autobiographical viewpoint on the early years of radio broadcasting in Ireland and together with Rex Cathcart's *The Most Contrary Region: The B.B.C. in Northern Ireland 1924-1984*, provides contextual information on the personalities and policies of both institutions – particularly in relation to news coverage and political comment in the face of conflicting political and cultural demands.

Where this study differs from the current bibliography in the general subject area, is that it assesses the elements of traditional print media together with radio broadcasting in promoting the aims of a political party, namely Fianna Fáil, in the inter-war years. It does not deal with ideologies *per se* but attempts to assess the policies, attitudes and influences of the state in relation to what people read in the *Irish Press* and to what they listened to by way of radio broadcasting.

The first chapter will examine the establishment of Fianna Fáil in 1926. It will outline the political and economic climate which led to the founding of the party and will focus on the social groups who considered themselves outside the interests of the incumbent government. These groups, predominately small

farmers, farm labourers and the urban working class aligned themselves to the new party. The party's aims echoed those of its electorate – land distribution, employment and housing – and in doing so built a community of loyal followers.

The second chapter will investigate to what extent print media ignored Fianna Fáil leading it to found its own newspaper. In establishing the *Nation* and the *Irish Press*, the party had channels through which it could promote its aims and policies and defend itself from its detractors.

Chapter three will consider how during the 1920s, the newly independent Irish state intended to use the novel medium of radio broadcasting to further its nation building ideals. Emphasis will be put on how the civic duty of radio and its responsibilities were debated worldwide by governments. Chapter four continues with this theme and focuses on the relationship between Fianna Fáil and the national broadcasting station, 2RN throughout the 1930s. During this period there was a move towards more commercially orientated programming.

The study questions whether Fianna Fáil used both the *Irish Press* and the broadcasting station 2RN to overly influence the readership and listenership and whether both media became a voice for the party rather than a voice for the people. Were the *Irish Press* and 2RN organs of communication or propaganda?

The study further aims to show the possibilities that exist in applying explorations of the mass media during the inter-war years as being a significant area of study, reflective of political, social and cultural perspectives in the early years of the Irish Free State.

CHAPTER ONE The Origins of Fianna Fáil.

In order to understand Fianna Fáil's need to communicate its ambitions, be it through the foundation of the *Irish Press* or through its policies on radio broadcasting, it is important to comprehend the social and political contexts in which the party was instigated. Dunphy and Lee have outlined the social groups which initially aligned themselves to the fledgling party.¹ What attracted these groups, predominately small farmers, farm labourers and the working urban class to Fianna Fáil? Why did these groups perceive themselves to be unaligned with Cumann na nGaedheal policies? How did Fianna Fáil gain their support? This chapter examines the contexts in which Fianna Fáil was established and why the party was attractive to specific social groups.

I

By 1923 universal suffrage was granted to all men and women over the age of twenty-one and resident in the Irish Free State. Tom Garvin states that, as a result, voter turnout increased by over 220,000 with 1,750,000 now eligible to have a say in running their country.² Continued non-recognition of the Irish Free State by Sinn Féin combined with parliamentary abstentionism asked much of an electorate who wished for something more than nationalist rhetoric which continued to emphasise cultural identity over economic development. The questioning of such abstentionism was reflected in the results of both the March

¹ Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland* (London, 1995), p. 97; J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 186.

² Tom Garvin, 'Nationalist Elites. Irish Votes and Irish Political Development: A Comparative Perspective', in *Economic and Social Review*, viii (1977), pp 161-184.

1925 by-elections and the June 1925 local government elections – the first local government elections to be held since the end of the civil war – when Sinn Féin received only eleven per cent of the poll.³ These results can be read as an indication that republican parties needed a different approach in their opposition to the governing policies of the Irish Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal. Fianna Fáil, which was founded in May 1926, appealed to those voters who believed themselves unaligned with government policies while still in support of a distinct Irish nationality and a self-sufficient economy.

Following the Civil War, Cumann na nGaedheal's main policy objectives were to defend the state against internal revolt, to restore law and order, to establish a civil service, maintain free trade, develop agriculture, balance the budget and to revive the Irish language.⁴ The government's aim was to provide pragmatic leadership to a population seeking peace and stability after almost a decade of unrest.

However, it has been argued by both Garvin and Pyne that Cumann na nGaedheal's support base which mainly consisted of the urban middle class, big farmers, shopkeepers and former unionists accentuated its lack of political appeal to the wider population which included large numbers of small farmers, agricultural labourers and an urban working class.⁵ By leaving intact the policy of free trade which it had inherited from the British, the government 'gave no indication that it wished to alter the traditional role of Ireland as the agricultural

³ Peter Pyne, 'The New Irish State and the Decline of the Republican Sinn Féin Party, 1923-1926', in *Éire-Ireland* xi (1976), pp 33-65.

⁴ Maryann Gialenella Valiulis, 'After the revolution: the formative years of Cumann na nGaedheal' in Audrey S. Eyler and Robert F. Garratt (eds), *The Uses of the Past: Essays on Irish Culture* (Wilmington, 1988), pp 131-143.

⁵ Garvin, p. 164. Pyne, p. 34.

complement to industrial England.’⁶ Further negating the ideal of a self-sufficient Ireland, Cumann na nGaedheal policy argued that ‘a well governed Ireland would receive positive economic benefits from its association with Britain and quickly forget old passions and hatreds.’⁷ At the core of these hatreds was the swearing of an oath of allegiance to the constitution of the Irish Free State first, and then to the Crown by virtue of the ‘common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain’ by elected members of the Free State government.⁸

At the March 1926 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, Éamon de Valera proposed that should the oath be abolished, Sinn Féin would enter the Dáil and take their part in the governance of the country. In stating that the oath was and always had been, ‘a barrier which no-one may cross and remain a member of Sinn Féin, de Valera asked ‘if members would, as a result of its abolition, take their seats in the Free State assembly.’⁹ By doing so, he believed that the party was able to honour their voters’ mandate therefore allowing Sinn Féin to become a legitimate voice in the governing of the state. He further argued that economic conditions in the Free State had demoralised republicans and their supporters, many of whom were destitute because they were unable to find employment under a political system that was hostile to their beliefs. De Valera also feared that if government members were ‘replaced by farmers and labourers and other

⁶ E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977), p. 73.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of the Taoiseach (DT): Article 17, Irish Free State Constitution 1922. I (name) do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established, and that I will be faithful to H.M. King George V, his heirs and successors by law in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.

⁹ University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), Fianna Fáil, FF/22: Transcript of statement to the press regarding Eamon de Valera’s calling of an extraordinary Árd Fheis of Sinn Féin 15 January 1926.

class interests, the national interest as a whole will be submerged in the clashing of rival economic groups.’¹⁰

In this case his concerns were not unfounded as, in the election of June 1927, the Labour Party took 22 seats, The Farmer’s Party took 11, Independents 14 and the National League 8 seats.¹¹ The combined vote of these groups was considerably higher than either Cumann na nGaedheal or Fianna Fáil. In the hostile political climate of the 1920s when small farmers, agricultural labourers and the urban working class looked beyond Cumann na nGaedheal to further their interests, they saw little to work politically in their favour.

Approximately twenty per cent of the agricultural workforce consisted of labourers, not farmers.¹² Relations between farmers and labourers had been tense since 1919 when labourers joined the Transport Union in a bid to stabilise their wages, which had fallen by over 15 per cent between 1922 and 1926.¹³ Exceptionally wet summer weather in 1923 and 1924 resulted in poor harvest in 1925 and 1926 leading to an economic slump which affected the entire country.

With the exception of the Shannon Scheme for the generation of electricity and the establishment of the first sugar beet processing factory in Carlow, expansion of industry was deemed less important to that of agriculture and this further alienated an urban working class electorate. The Labour Party continued to be riven by ongoing internal dissension with the trade union movements following countrywide industrial disputes including those of postal

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cornelius O’Leary, *Irish Elections, 1918-1977: Parties, Voters, and Proportional Representation* (Dublin 1979), p. 25.

¹² Mary E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p. 139.

¹³ Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics 1890-1930* (Dublin, 1974), p. 186.

workers, Dublin dockers and Waterford farm labourers.¹⁴ These actions resulted in the loss of over a million working days during 1923, which, according to David Johnson and Joseph Lee, provoked much disillusion which resulted in physical attacks on delegates at the annual Labour Party Conference in 1924.¹⁵ A political vacuum existed where one party could represent the interests of unrepresented social groups – small farmers, labourers and the urban working class.

This vacuum, according to Dunphy, reflected the failure of both the Free State government and the Labour Party leadership to produce a political strategy which could unite the various disaffected groups.¹⁶ Such groups came to be referred to as ‘the men of no property’ – a phrase which originated with Theobald Wolfe Tone, the founding father of republicanism in Ireland.¹⁷ Chief among these were small farmers, men of some property, who were hoping for a greater distribution of land acquired from the big estates under the terms of the various Land Acts prior to independence. For the majority of people living in rural Ireland, access to land continued to be a commodity which, according to Terence Dooley, was ‘more desirable than independence.’¹⁸

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 made no provision for the completion of land purchases or for the redistribution of large untenanted estates. While Cumann na nGaedheal’s 1923 Land Act has been associated with the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ David Johnson, *The Inter-War Economy in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1985), p. 58. J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 95.

¹⁶ Dunphy, p. 48.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Terence Dooley, ‘Land and politics in independent Ireland, 1923-48: the case for reappraisal’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxiv no.134 (2004), pp 176-197.

completion of land purchases both Dooley and Dunphy stress continuing dissatisfaction among farm tenants and labourers regarding the terms of both purchase and redistribution.¹⁹ For the rural electorate, land reform was an important issue especially for those who, according to Dunphy, were hoping for more land and a bigger home market for their products.²⁰

‘We were,’ wrote Christopher Stephen “Todd” Andrews, ‘the children of unimportant men ... who had no ambition beyond rearing their families to be educated and decent citizens.’²¹ Such aspirations would attract many to the nascent Fianna Fáil party where meritocracy, and not inherited wealth or status, would bring ‘credit to the nation, and moderate prosperity to individuals through their own enterprise, industry and government policy.’²² Throughout the 1930s, the *Irish Press* supported such self-sufficient enterprise through articles which educated small producers on bee-keeping, cheese-making, poultry rearing, and the use of natural fertilisers such as seaweed and animal manure.²³ Similarly, outside radio broadcasts from farms and craft workshops were popular features of radio programming. Such programmes gave voice to the worker, their knowledge and experience rather than to that of the government official. In both

¹⁹ Ibid. Dunphy, p. 49.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Christopher Stephen (Todd) Andrews, *Man of No Property* (Cork, 1982), p. 28. Andrews (1901-1985) was an Irish political activist and public servant. He was a supporter, though not a member, of Fianna Fáil. He was managing director of Bord na Móna, the turf development company from 1946 to 1958 when he became chairman of Córas Iompair Éireann (C.I.E.) the Irish transport system. He served as chairman of Radió Teilifís Éireann (R.T.É.) from 1966 to 1970. James McGuire and James Quinn (eds) *Director of Irish Biography* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009), i, 131.

²² Kevin Boland, *The Rise and Decline of Fianna Fáil* (Cork, 1982), p. 92.

²³ *Irish Press*, various dates between 1931 and 1939. These articles would become very useful once rationing was introduced during World War Two. From the late 1940s regular articles stressed frugality on all aspects of household management from grocery shopping to the care of personal clothing.

instances it can be seen that communication media educated and connected people through a shared experience.

II

Both Dunphy and Regan posit that those sections of society disillusioned by Cumann na nGaedheal's dependency on business and professional elites were drawn towards the more egalitarian Fianna Fáil.²⁴ Cumann na nGaedheal perceived themselves as the party of respectability, of law and order and of social stability.²⁵ Local branch organisers looked to towns and districts elites to influence their communities. Regan claims that 'where doctor, merchant and lawyer would lead, patient, customer and client would somehow follow.'²⁶ Such a concept is best described by Regan as a 'social status where respectability and influence were assumed to rest on wealth, education and private patronage.'²⁷ In contrast, Kevin Boland persuaded Fianna Fáil organisers to convince the local hurler or footballer to influence their communities to align themselves with the new party.²⁸ Such men were notables in their locales and together with former anti-treatyite leaders helped foster the republican ideal of meritocracy with the growing Fianna Fáil party.

In November 1923 Cumann na nGaedheal published the findings of its Fiscal Inquiry Committee which set out its economic policies.²⁹ These plans favoured free trade over protectionism, agriculture over industry, and the cattle

²⁴ Dunphy, pp 73, 78-9, 87-144; John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936* (Dublin, 1999), p. 306-7.

²⁵ John P. McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins: Builder of the Irish State* (Dublin, 2006), p. 24.

²⁶ Regan, p. 308.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kevin Boland (1917-2001) was a Fianna Fáil politician who held various government ministries between 1957 and 1970.

²⁹ Lee, p. 119.

trade over tillage. This meant that the grazing ranches would not be broken up and redistributed to tenant holders and the landless. Such policies were perceived to favour large farmers at the expense of small holders, a group from which republicans gained their greatest support.³⁰ Timothy M. O'Neill posits that Cumann na nGaedheal's decision to pursue the economic status quo presented Sinn Féin with an opportunity to develop an economic programme focused on industrial protectionism and the breaking up the ranches.³¹ In 1926, these ideas would form the backbone of Fianna Fáil social and economic policies.

Dunphy states that from the outset Cumann na nGaedheal made clear its complete commitment to the cattle trade and its distaste for any governmental initiatives to encourage further investment in or expansion of industry.³² In short, it abandoned the aspirations of the working classes – rural and urban – who had looked to Sinn Féin and the ideals of national independence for increased prosperity. The Minister for Agriculture, Patrick Hogan, summed up governmental policy as 'helping the farmer who helped himself and letting the rest go to the devil.'³³ This one-sided concentration on the development of agriculture based on the prosperity of the large farmer – especially the large grass farmers; the ranchers – would also impact negatively on farm labourers through lower wages and rising emigration. Thus, a large swathe of the

³⁰ Mary E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-1939* (Dublin, 1992), p. 14.

³¹ Timothy M. O'Neill, 'Reframing the Republic: Republican Socio-Economic Thought and the Road to Fianna Fáil, 1923-26' in Mel Farrell, Jason Knirck and Ciara Meehan (eds), *A Formative Decade. Ireland in the 1920s* (Dublin, 2015), pp 157-176.

³² Dunphy, p. 50.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 51.

electorate was abandoned and it was from the rural poor that Fianna Fáil would in time gain much of their support.

III

Between 1924 and 1926 Sinn Féin struggled to define socio-economic objectives. At the 1925 Ard Fheis, the need for an economic policy was clearly outlined by Eamon Donnelly, Director of Organisation, who told delegates that ‘the party was dying because of emigration and its lack of a definite social and economic plan.’³⁴ In response, delegate Margaret Buckley stressed that rank and file republicans and others wanted to know how their lives would be different under a Republican government.³⁵ Political policy continued to be the main focus of the party.

When the Sinn Féin Executive met in January 1926, it was to decide on political policy. Central to this was whether abstention was a principle or a tactic if the oath was removed. As Sinn Féin’s elected members continued to abstain from government, de Valera claimed, legitimately, that the absence of a republican voice in the Dáil gave Cumann na nGaedheal full powers to pursue their economic plans. He further stressed that republican abstention helped sanction the British government’s claim on the six counties of Northern Ireland as laid down by the Boundary Commission in 1925.

Seán Lemass, cognisant of the power of press communication, wrote a series of articles in *An Phoblacht* which called on the Sinn Féin leadership to

³⁴ National Library of Ireland (NLI) Robert Barton Papers, MS 8786 (6). Report of the Director of Organisation, Sinn Féin rd Fheis, 17 November 1925.

³⁵ Ibid.

change and accept the challenges facing the country.³⁶ Such cognisance, in later years, influenced Lemass in calling for the establishment of a national newspaper which would act as a voice for political ideology. The Sinn Féin executive unable to make a decision on political policy called for an extraordinary Ard Fheis to decide on the issue. Using this opportunity, de Valera put forward the proposal for Sinn Féin to enter the Dáil as a matter of tactics rather than principle once the oath was abolished.

When he was narrowly defeated in this proposal by the absolute republicans led by Mary MacSwiney – 223 votes to 218 – de Valera stepped down as president of Sinn Féin and resigned from the party.³⁷ Others, including Countess Markievicz, Seán Lemass Seán T. O’Kelly, Seán MacEntee, Patrick (P.J.) Rutledge, Dr James Ryan and Gerald Boland, joined de Valera. This group went on to form the core a new political entity – Fianna Fáil. De Valera and his followers broke from Sinn Féin on a purely hypothetical point – that elected Sinn Féin delegates would take their Dáil seats if the oath was removed.

IV

Great care was taken in selecting a name for this new party with de Valera explaining that Fianna Fáil was chosen

to symbolise a banding together of the people for national service, with a standard of personal honour for all who join as high as that which characterised the ancient Fianna Éireann and a spirit of devotion equal to that of the Irish Volunteers from 1913 to 1921.³⁸

³⁶ John Horgan, *Séan Lemass: The Enigmatic Patriot* (Dublin, 1997), p. 42.

³⁷ Lee, p. 152.

³⁸ John Coakley, ‘The significance of names: The evolution of Irish party labels’ in *Études Irlandaises*, v (1980), pp 174-178. Fianna Fáil is loosely translated into English as The Soldiers/Warriors of Destiny. *Fáil* is the genitive case of *Fál*, one of the three goddesses with *Banba* and *Éirú* who symbolised Ireland. The Fianna were a mythical band of warriors. Fianna Fáil was an alternative name for the Irish Volunteers/Óglaigh n hÉireann put forward by Eoin

While Seán Lemass favoured ‘The Republican Party’, de Valera sought continuity with the volunteers of the Easter Rising. His suggestion had the mystical attraction of reaching back to Irish mythology, evoking stories of the legendary hero-soldier Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors, the Fianna. A Gaelic title also emphasised independence and difference from pro-British politics while also referencing the mythic past beloved of the early revolutionaries. Lemass countered that people could not understand an Irish title and that the word ‘Fáil’ would be distorted by their opponents to the English word ‘fail’.³⁹ Thus, the official name – Fianna Fáil, The Republican Party – became a compromise of the poetic and the pragmatic which was a reflection, perhaps, of the attitudes of both de Valera and Lemass.

V

In his address to the inaugural meeting of Fianna Fáil at the La Scala Theatre Dublin on 16 May 1926, de Valera outlined the social and economic ambitions of the party. He spoke of an ‘Everyman...young, honest and courageous, but without set prejudices or any commitments of his past to hamper him; one who aims solely at serving the national cause and bringing it to a successful issue.’⁴⁰ According to de Valera, this young ‘Everyman’, free from Civil War bias,

MacNeill in 1913. The initials FF are still used by the Irish Defence Forces on cap badges. It was also the name of a weekly pamphlet written by Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920) and distributed in Republican circles throughout Munster from September to December 1914.

³⁹ UCDA/FF/2: Minutes of meeting, 10 May 1926.

⁴⁰ UCDA/FF/1/4: Text of de Valera’s address to the inaugural meeting of Fianna Fáil, 16 May 1926.

questioned ‘the pretence of democracy which the Oath of Allegiance presents.’⁴¹

De Valera answered him thus:

Today, we are making a new start for another attempt to get the nation out of the paralysing “Treaty” dilemma ... Whilst waiting for the achievement of the full political independence we aspire to, the Republican deputies would be able to take an effective part in improving social and material conditions of the people and in building up the strength and morale of the nation as a whole.⁴²

This address can be seen as a draft outline for Fianna Fáil’s national aims. The party’s ambition was to not only uphold a republican ethos but also to win elections with rhetoric which aspired to improve the social and economic life of the electorate. These aims were reiterated throughout Patrick Boland’s campaign address at Tullamore during the run-up to the 1927 General Election.⁴³

The first objective was ‘to secure the unity and independence of Ireland as a Republic’, an aim that was central to the party’s ideology and to its claim to be *the* Republican Party.⁴⁴ Considered in the light of the Cumann na nGaedheal boundary Commission fiasco, this primary ambition reinforced the concept that Fianna Fáil wholeheartedly desired unification of the country. It also, unambiguously, allied the party to the ideals of the Easter Rising. The importance of this objective was summarised in the obligatory pledge taken by all Fianna Fáil candidates during its first electoral campaign in May/June 1927. The pledge which includes the proviso to ‘to support Fianna Fáil in every action

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Midland Tribune*, 26 May 1927. Boland was subsequently elected as a Fianna Fáil Teachta Dála (TD) for the Leix-Offaly constituency, retaining his seat until his retirement from politics in 1954. James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Directory of Irish Biography*,

⁴⁴ Fianna Fáil, *A Brief Outline of the Aims and Programmes of Fianna Fáil* (Dublin, 1927), p. 2. NLI. EPH C641.

it takes to secure the independence of a *United Ireland*...takes up an entire page in the party's election manifesto.⁴⁵ It was accompanied by lengthy quotations from revolutionary leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Wolfe Tone and James Fintan Lalor.⁴⁶

The party's second aim was to restore Irish as *the* spoken language as opposed to *a* spoken language. The idea that Ireland's independent future lay with the revival of the Irish language derived from the ideals of the Gaelic League whose founder Douglas Hyde, called on his fellow countrymen to 'build up an Irish nation on Irish lines' in his seminal lecture 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland'.⁴⁷ The Irish language was considered central to Irish identity. Of core importance to this sense of identity was that the Irish people were different to the British by way of language and therefore entitled to national self-determination.⁴⁸ While symbolic of such difference, its revival was never a widely held or popular ideal. The bulk of the population, commercial interests and government business continued to use English as the everyday working language. For the purpose of this study, the inclusion by the *Irish Press* of a dedicated language section will be explored in Chapter Three. Both Cumann na nGaedheal's and Fianna Fáil's consideration of radio broadcasting as a vital element in language restoration will be outlined in Chapter Four.

Fianna Fáil's initial aims were idealistic at best, especially that of restoring the Irish language, but the third and fourth objectives were more

⁴⁵ Ibid. Writer's italics.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', in *The Revival of Irish Literature* (eds) Charles Gavan Duffy, George Sigerson and Douglas Hyde (London, 1894), p. 120-125.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

pragmatic. These aimed to ‘make the resources and wealth of Ireland subservient to the needs and welfare of all the people of Ireland’ and ‘to make Ireland as far as possible, economically self-contained and self-sufficing.’⁴⁹ Economic development was important for political independence. For the majority of Irish citizens the 1920s was a decade of static or declining real income and diminished employment opportunities.⁵⁰ Emigration, which had ceased during the Great War, resumed with the return of peace, and a pattern was re-established that endured for many decades. Between 1924 and 1927 over 100,000 people, most of them young, emigrated to North America, Australia and Great Britain.⁵¹ The inability of the Free State government to provide jobs for people at home was embarrassing for nationalists who had long blamed emigration and economic stagnation on the failings of British rule.⁵² It is against this background that Fianna Fáil’s drive to enlist small farmer and labourer support needs to be considered.

The ideology of the small, self-sufficient homestead had a strong influence on labour intensive tillage. The production of food for the home market rather than for export appealed to the small farmer and to the farm labourer who saw opportunities for themselves in contrast to the export driven interests of the ranchers and large farmers. According to Dunphy, the discontent of small farmers had not been met by the Cumann na nGaedheal government nor by a Labour party weakened by ongoing internal disputes.⁵³ Subsidies for land improvement were unavailable to most small producers due to bureaucratic

⁴⁹ Fianna Fáil, p. 2. NLI. EPH C641

⁵⁰ Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p. 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 141.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 30.

⁵³ Dunphy, p. 95.

red tape.⁵⁴ Agricultural labourers' wages declined steadily from 1924 onwards, they were not entitled to unemployment benefits as their work was considered seasonal and inconsistent. Any legislation to improve wages and working conditions was resisted by the large farmer groups who were perceived as being supporters of Cumann na nGaedheal.⁵⁵

The fifth and sixth national aims also focused on rural life with the party's ambition 'to establish as many families as practicable on the land' and 'by suitable distribution of power to promote the ruralisation of industries essential to the lives of people as opposed to their concentration in the cities.'⁵⁶ These objectives would in time, especially during the 1930s, come to partial fruition through improvements in land distribution, housing, agricultural redevelopment and protectionist policies for industry especially for those allied to agriculture, for example in building sugar beet processing factories in Thurles, Mallow and Tuam in 1933. Advertisements for Irish companies and Irish made goods were given prominent place in the *Irish Press* throughout this period. Similarly, changes to programming content were made at the national broadcasting station to favour Irish advertisers. These themes will be discussed further in chapters three and four.

The belief that farming and rural life were essential elements of Irishness was strengthened by the long-held tendency to define Irishness in binary terms to British industrialisation. This concept is best exemplified by the writing of

⁵⁴ Daly, p. 142.

⁵⁵ Dunphy, p. 98 and Daly, p. 143.

⁵⁶ This fifth aim would, in 1937, become part of the Constitution of Ireland in Article 45/2/v: 'That they may be established on the land in economic security as many families as in the circumstances shall be practicable.'

David Patrick (D.P.) Moran which stress the ‘true Gael’s anti-materialist, but not socialist, outlook on life’ which he contrasted to ‘the greed and pollution of the human spirit’ by extensive unplanned industrialisation throughout Britain in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Allied to this ideology was the central role played by the Land Wars of 1879-1882 in pursuance of fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale all of which helped create a cohesive movement for self-government and nation building. Conquest and colonisation were associated with the confiscation of Irish land and the settlement of intruders from England and Scotland. Correspondingly, the restoration of an independent Ireland was linked with restoring the land to native ownership, the revival of the Irish language and an emphasis on Irish sports and culture.⁵⁸ The importance of these ideals to the new state would be debated at length as radio broadcasting became popular in the mid-1920s.

The fact that nineteenth-century industrial development and urban expansion were concentrated in the unionist stronghold of north-east Ulster, particularly around Belfast and Co. Antrim, helped reinforce the belief that nationalist Ireland was rural and agrarian. Ireland was not unique in its belief that rural life was superior to that of urban existence. During the 1920s and 1930s a British ‘Back to the Land’ movement gained support as a possible solution to mass unemployment with the Conservative government actively

⁵⁷ D.P. Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Dublin, 1905), p. 27. Moran (1869-1936) founded the influential weekly newspaper the *Leader* in 1900 which, through its editorials, claimed that Irish life and culture had to be protected from outside influence especially that of the English press, magazines and novels. Moran’s biographer, Peter Maume posits that the *Leader* provided an important forum for debate in the crucial period between the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1890 and the 1916 Easter Rising. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the *Leader* campaigned against popular music being played in dance halls and on the radio calling popular music, in particular jazz, ‘imported debasement and rot.’: NLI. *Leader*, 12 January 1934.

⁵⁸ ‘The land of Ireland for the people of Ireland’ was a core tenet in the founding of the Irish National Land League in 1878 as reported in the *Connaught Telegraph*, 2 November 1878.

supporting a return to small scale farming through subsidies and low interest loans.⁵⁹ Likewise, in France, Germany and Italy rural life was idealised by governments in the aftermath of the Great War and its industrial carnage.⁶⁰

VI

From the outset, Fianna Fáil considered itself not only as a political alternative to Cumann na nGaedheal but also as a cultural option. The nationwide network of cumainn or branches became focal points for social activity. At the 1929 Árd Fheis the honorary secretaries' report stated that

Everything possible should be done to counteract the tendency in recent years among member to concentrate exclusively on purely political matters, and members should realise that work done to foster the Irish language games and customs was useful work for the Fianna Fáil movement.⁶¹

Many of the proposed activities were social in context while also having a strong national dimension. For example, the National Executive circulated, free of charge, a book of political songs in the Irish language. This was accompanied by a request that they be learned so that 'when the occasion would arise for the singing of songs, they could be sung in Irish rather than in English.'⁶² Members were also urged to learn Irish not just for administrative purposes but also for social events. At the founding of the Free State in 1922 proficiency in the Irish language became compulsory for entry to the civil service and for local authority jobs. To assist civil servants in retraining, improving and cultivating their

⁵⁹ Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, 2011), p. 241.

⁶⁰ David Priestland, *The Red Flag. Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2010), p. 106.

⁶¹ UCDA/FF/P176: Honorary Secretaries' Report, 1929.

⁶² UCDA/FF/704: Minutes of the National Executive, 5 January 1928

language skills Cumann Gaodhalach na Stát Sheirbhíse was established in 1925. Fianna Fáil, in contrast, believed social events were a better way of encouraging language skills, especially the speaking of Irish. During the 1920s and 1930s, Fianna Fáil cumainn organised public lectures on aspects of Gaelic history and culture; outings to historical sites and *céilithe* (Irish dances set to traditional music) throughout the country placing a strong emphasis on youth involvement. Through these activities Fianna Fáil replicated the Gaelic League by focusing on social participation to develop political and cultural cohesion. As the 1930s progressed, programming on 2RN replicated these talks and music offerings as did the *Irish Press* in its very popular series of articles by Aodh de Blacam on Irish towns and villages to further bolster their audience and readership. Such programmes and articles further demonstrate the links which existed between Fianna Fáil, the *Irish Press* and the national broadcaster.

Fianna Fáil through its objectives directed its energies towards those who felt abandoned by the incumbent government. Fianna Fáil's republican ethos was rooted in the economic issues of the day which were increasing unemployment and emigration especially for the rural poor who, without land, had little or no prospects of a livelihood. In targeting this disaffected electorate the aim was to develop a deep and abiding identification with the party and its political programme. In short, these aims echoed the aspirations of the First Dáil of 1919 as outlined in its Democratic Programme to create employment through the development of agriculture, trade and industry; to invest in health and education and to generally improve life for the people of Ireland.⁶³ Accordingly,

⁶³Brian Farrell, *The Creation of the Dáil* (Dublin, 1994), pp 61-75. The Democratic Programme included the following; public ownership of the means of production, natural

the early socio-economic aspirations of Fianna Fáil were best described by Seán Lemass as being geared toward ‘the achievement of economic self-sufficiency, the preservation of our population, the improvement of the general standard of living and the abolition of the twin evils of Emigration and Unemployment.’⁶⁴ Fianna Fáil was perceived, particularly by those who were not aligned to Free State politics, as a cultural alternative to Cumann na nGaedheal. It was not, as Cumann na nGaedheal would later claim, ‘the party of disorder and insecurity, of intemperateness and spendthriftiness, of unreason and irrationality. It was, according to Prager, a party which claimed to offer change to the status quo.’⁶⁵ In the June 1927 election campaign de Valera asserted the main purpose of Fianna Fáil was to reclaim Ireland from foreign powers and their allies by stating that

We are prepared to take over the machinery of government, to work it in the interest of the whole nation...to make it so representative of the whole people as to secure for it the necessary authority and influence to its decision readily accepted and its laws willingly obeyed.⁶⁶

Fianna Fáil’s organisational structure served it well from its foundation in 1926 to its entry into the Dáil in August 1927. Central to this organisation was the support of men and women who believed in parliamentary representation to further republican ideals of national unification, self-sufficiency, the decentralisation of industry leading to the cessation of

resources and wealth; state provision of education for children and care for the elderly; ensuring that children receive food; promotion of industrial development as well as the development of natural resources.

⁶⁴ UCDA/FF/59 Seán Lemass: 30 June 1931.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland: Order and Cultural Integration in a Newly Independent Nation* (Cambridge, 1986), p.197.

⁶⁶ Moynihan, p. 148.

unemployment and emigration. As the party achieved its electoral aims by taking its place in the Dáil, its ambition to govern and to implement its aspirations grew; as did its need to further expand its support base. The party founders aimed to achieve this by having a sympathetic press to support its objectives. A new Irish daily newspaper, such as the *Irish Press* aimed to overturn the influence of British newspapers and to provide a solution to

Juvenile literature which serves to turn the minds of Irish girls and boys away from Irish ideals, to make them despise Irish culture and the Irish national tradition. Many of the papers are in effect recruiting agencies for the British boy Scouts, which in turn are a recruiting agency for the British Army and Navy.⁶⁷

How Fianna Fáil set about organising support – ideological and financial - for such a daily newspaper will be explored within the following chapter.

⁶⁷ *Irish Catholic Directory*, 28 March 1930. Letter to the paper from Father Richard Devane S.J.

CHAPTER TWO Establishing the *Irish Press*

The new party, Fianna Fáil, needed publicity to establish itself and to generate interest in its aims and ambitions. Did the founding of the *Irish Press* by Eamon de Valera and its launch on 5 September 1931 give Fianna Fáil a national voice and further cement its connection to its members? Why was the *Irish Press* founded and how was it initially funded? How did the *Irish Press* differ in content to its main nation rivals, the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times*? How influential was its first editor, Frank Gallagher? This chapter will explore the importance of the *Irish Press* to Fianna Fáil in the party's quest for power in an often hostile political climate.

I

Speaking in Boston in March 1927 on a fundraising tour, de Valera told his audience that while the 'Irish people were engaged in a heroic effort to revive our native language, national customs, national values and national culture, these objectives could not be achieved without a cheap, healthy and native press.¹ At the time, there were eighteen British daily newspapers available in the Free State with a combined circulation of 165,000; twelve British Sunday newspapers with a circulation of 429,411 and over one hundred weekly, fortnightly and monthly publications which were either written in English or from a viewpoint which favoured British cultural ideas.² While there were many regional weekly newspapers, the leading Irish daily newspapers were centred in

¹ Moynihan, pp 24-5.

² Cathcart and Muldoon, p. 674.

Dublin with the exception of *The Cork Examiner* which covered the Munster region. The *Freeman's Journal*, founded in 1763 and originally an organ of the Irish Parliamentary Party, welcomed and supported the Cumann na nGaedheal government and its policies. The *Irish Independent* re-launched in 1905 claimed not to be the mouthpiece for any party and to be 'independent in fact as well as in name.'³ However, with the founding of the Free State the paper became the main communication medium of the new administration, the growing Catholic middle-class and the rancher community as outlined by its editorials throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For example, it described the Censorship of Publications Bill of 1928 as being 'a fair and reasonable scheme for checking a grave menace to public and private morality.'⁴ The *Irish Times* was predominately the paper of the Protestant commercial and professional classes. The paper took an anti-Republican stance on the 1916 Rising making many references to 'cold blooded murders by Sinn Feiners [sic] and the disgraceful shooting down of government troops.'⁵ Similarly, the *Irish Independent* referred to the rebellion as 'criminal madness.'⁶

The early republican journals were essentially political pamphlets rather than newspapers. Between 1896 and 1903, several small publications were established and inspired by the Irish-Ireland ethos of the Gaelic League. *An Claidheamh Soluis* published by the Gaelic League between March 1898 and September 1919 was edited by Eoin MacNeill, founder of the Irish Volunteers and influenced by Pádraig Pearse. *An Claidheamh Soluis* campaigned to have

³ *Irish Independent*, 2 January 1905.

⁴ *Irish Independent*, 13 August 1928.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 29 April 1916.

⁶ *Irish Independent*, 26 April 1916.

the Irish language at the heart of Irish education and to have Irish as a compulsory subject for matriculation to the National University of Ireland. The editor of *The Leader*, D. P. Moran, advocated many issues such as the need to foster indigenous Irish industry and protection for Irish agriculture. The paper, according to Horgan, also attacked social aspects of Irish life with the subservience of the middle classes to British interests being a favourite, especially the continued publication by the Dublin press of engagements by the British Royal Family.⁷ The *Irish Bulletin*, published by the first Dáil in 1919 with the assistance of Robert Brennan, Erskine Childers and Frank Gallagher – who in 1931 became the first editor of the *Irish Press* - was a daily publication with a circulation of over two thousand.⁸ Copies were sent to newspapers and governments worldwide to promote the cause of Irish independence. It was published until 1921.

Following the split over the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, the anti-Treaty side published *The Republic of Ireland/Phoblacht na hÉireann* from January of that year. Prominent Republicans such as Cathal Brugha, Austin Stack, Countess Markievicz and Erskine Childers wrote for the journal. The pro-Treaty provisional government responded by issuing *The Free State*, which was first published in February 1922, with articles by Ernest Blythe, Kevin O'Higgins, Eoin MacNeill and Desmond Fitzgerald. In June 1922, the provisional government enacted press controls aimed at suppressing anti-Treaty publications. These controls obliged printers to submit any articles referring to the Civil War for official approval prior to printing which resulted in the disbandment of many

⁷ Horgan, p. 34.

⁸ Hugh Oram, *The Newspaper Book: A History of newspapers in Ireland 1649-1983* (Dublin, 1983), p. 18.

presses. *The Republic of Ireland/Phoblacht na hÉireann* was restricted to a southern edition published in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary under the editorship of Erskine Childers and Frank Gallagher.⁹ In 1924, Republican sympathisers tried to buy the defunct title to the *Freeman's Journal*. However, their efforts were thwarted by William Martin Murphy, owner of the *Irish Independent*, who bought the title and presses for £24,000 and merged it with his own paper.¹⁰

II

According to Seán Lemass, Fianna Fáil at this time was 'only beating the air without a press behind it.'¹¹ In response Fianna Fáil began a worldwide campaign in 1927 to raise the necessary capital to establish a newspaper. In Ireland, a nationwide drive of door-to-door collections, membership draws and dances fund-raising dances were held. In Australia, Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, a personal friend of de Valera, urged his parishioners to buy bonds and to financially support the venture.¹² De Valera with Frank Gallagher and others toured the United States of America seeking financial backing for what he described as a 'newspaper that would really represent the Irish people...'¹³ De Valera further claimed that he went to the United States to

organise the support of our people for complete independence...One of the means by which the movement for Irish independence could best be organised and supported in my opinion was through an Irish newspaper that would really represent the Irish people and I went to America to get subscriptions for the capital of that newspaper.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid. p. 26.

¹⁰ Horgan, p. 29.

¹¹ UCDA/FF/1410/2: undated letter from Lemass to de Valera, 1927.

¹² Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press* (Dublin, 2001), p. 14.

¹³ Horgan, p. 40. De Valera and Gallagher were known to each other republican circles in Dublin. By 1922 they were in discussion about the possibility of launching a propagandist national newspaper.

¹⁴ O'Brien, p. 15.

However, de Valera, as O'Brien outlines, presented the idea of a newspaper very differently in America and Ireland. In the United States, he tendered the idea of a national newspaper to potential backers, whereas in Ireland the newspaper was presented to supporters as that of 'our newspaper.'¹⁵

The need for a national newspaper to counter British influence was a major theme in de Valera's speeches and writings during his visits to America in 1927. On his arrival in New York during December of that year he told a press conference 'there is nothing so important for Ireland as a newspaper that will champion her freedom.'¹⁶ In further promotional material circulated in the United States in 1930 de Valera claimed that the existing daily press in Ireland was 'consistently pro-British and imperialistic in its outlook ... During the European war, it was the main vehicle for lying British propaganda and was the sole agency in luring young Irishmen into a war in which 50,000 of them lost their lives.'¹⁷ In support of his attack on the pernicious influence of the pro-British press, de Valera quoted the Irish Jesuit writer and polemicist Father Richard Devane S. J. who in a letter to the *Irish Catholic Directory* bemoaned that 'a glance at the counter of any newspaper shop ... will convince even the most sceptical that we are in a condition of mental bondage.'¹⁸ This campaign against the British popular press reflected Hyde's belief in the need to rid Ireland of British cultural influence and also Fianna Fáil's ambitions for social, economic and political self-sufficiency.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Moynihan, p. 67.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁸ *Irish Catholic Directory*, 28 March 1930.

In March 1927, Fianna Fáil launched its first party publication, *The Nation*. This was a weekly paper which took its name from the nineteenth-century radical journal edited by Thomas Davis. *The Nation* was edited by Fianna Fáil T.D. Seán T. O’Kelly until 1929 when Frank Gallagher took over.¹⁹ The paper was established not only to promote Fianna Fáil’s aspirations but also as an alternative to the Irish Republican Army’s (I.R.A.) broadsheet, *An Phoblacht* which, according to Horgan, had weekly sales of over forty thousand copies.²⁰ *The Nation* adopted a populist, anti-imperialist stance with headlines such as ‘Irish Labour Party Stands for Imperialism’ and ‘Cumann na nGaedheal’s Subterfuge Fails.’ This helped brand both parties as being responsible for the economic malaise afflicting the country.²¹ The paper promoted Fianna Fáil’s protectionist policies and published the party’s election material during the two 1927 general elections. Despite the hostility of the existing press, Fianna Fáil won forty-five seats in June and fifty-seven in the September election.²² *The Nation* aimed to uphold Fianna Fáil’s ambitions and made a strong bid to win the support of the urban working classes and the poor with headlines that blamed the worsening economic crisis on the ‘imperialist and elitist Cumann na nGaedheal government.’²³ However, as a party publication it merely reflected its readers already avowed party beliefs and it

¹⁹ Frank Gallagher (1893-1962) was Personal Secretary to Eamon de Valera from 1927 to 1928; editor of the *Nation* 1928 to 1930; editor of the *Irish Press* 1931 to 1936; Deputy Director of Radio Teilifís Éireann (R.T.É.) 1936 to 1939 and Director of the Government Information Bureau 1939-1948. James McGuire and James Quinn (eds) *Directory of Irish Biography*, vi: *G-J* (Oxford, 2009), p. 8-9.

²⁰ Horgan, p. 6. *An Phoblacht* was found in Dublin in 1906 by Bulmer Hobson as a voice for the Dungannon Clubs which in April 1907 joined forces with other separatist associations to form the Sinn Féin League which went to become Sinn Féin in September 1908.

²¹ *The Nation*, 20 June 1928.

²² Horgan, p. 8.

²³ *The Nation*, 20 June 1928.

became clear that a more professional newspaper with a wider appeal was needed.

In early 1928, de Valera and Gallagher returned to the United States on another three-month fundraising tour for the establishment of such a newspaper and visited newspaper presses and studied production methods. They were keen to learn how best to utilise media as a means of promoting the aims of Fianna Fáil. They also visited radio broadcasting stations in Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. O'Brien states that at meetings with newspaper editors and broadcasting directors de Valera always asked how was it possible to control and shape the ideas of what was written or broadcast.²⁴ This interest and awareness in the potential of radio broadcasting came to fruition in the 1930s when Gallagher became Deputy Director of Radió Éireann and when de Valera broadcast to the nation in 1932 as part of the Eucharistic Congress celebrations.

Prior to his departure for America, de Valera wrote to Joseph McGarrity, a leading member of the Clan na nGael organisation and president of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (A.A.R.I.R.), asking him to help mobilise support among the Irish-American business community. De Valera wanted '1000 people ... to invest at least \$500 in the enterprise.'²⁵ He added that, 'as the proposition is purely a business one, it should not be difficult to find them.'²⁶ Initially fund-raising was profitable but as the year progressed and the economy entered a depression de Valera was advised by McGarrity to reduce the subscription limit from \$500 to \$50.²⁷ De

²⁴ O'Brien, p. 23.

²⁵ Joseph McGarrity Papers, NLI, MS 17441.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ O'Brien, p. 20.

Valera's frustration is evident from a letter sent to McGarrity on 29 September 1929, which stated 'up to the present, of the American quota of \$500,000 only \$135,000 has been subscribed ... the United States has so far been a sore disappointment.'²⁸ Oram notes that de Valera acknowledged that the poor response from American business circles was due to the onset of the economic depression which severely restricted the availability of capital for investment in a venture such as the *Irish Press*.²⁹

In Ireland, local cumainn organised door-to-door collections, modelled on Daniel O'Connell's and Sinn Féin's fund-raising, where even the smallest subscription was valued. Organisers sought out individuals who could subscribe for blocks of one hundred shares or more. The majority of £1 shares were sold on an instalment basis spread over one and two years.³⁰ By February 1929, £64,824 was collected through this scheme.³¹ Again, Fianna Fáil gave people a sense of belonging in a shared enterprise. O'Brien lists the occupations of those who subscribed as including shop assistants, tailors, nurses, barmaids, clerks farmers and bakers.³² However, difficulties arose with the onset of the Great Depression and the stock market crash in October 1929 led to severe worldwide economic hardship until the late 1930s.

When the *Irish Press* was incorporated in September 1928, the founding directors invested £500 each, apart from James Lyle Stirling, who invested £1,000. Later, Senator James Connolly, who replaced Stirling invested a further

²⁸ McGarrity Papers, MS 17441.

²⁹ Oram, p. 43.

³⁰ UCDA/FF/26. *The Need for a National Daily Newspaper in Ireland*. Pamphlet, 1929.

³¹ O'Brien, p. 27.

³² Ibid.

£500.³³ The board of directors consisted of prominent Irish businessmen and industrialists who had an interest in promoting the cause of native industry. De Valera was the Controlling Director and was by far the most powerful member of the board having ‘sole and absolute control of the public and political policy of the company and of the Editorial Management of all Newspapers, pamphlets or other writing which may be from time to time owned, published, circulated or printed by the said Company.’³⁴ Article 77 further spells out how de Valera had complete control over the hiring, firing and suspension of all staff members.³⁵ The paper was presented as being independent of any one party and not controlled by Fianna Fáil. As leader of the party de Valera could, whenever necessary, act to ensure that it did not work in opposition to Fianna Fáil’s interests. Horgan claims that by setting the paper at such an arm’s length from the party it created a veneer of political independence and it protected its journalists and writers from the type of political and personal interference by party committees.³⁶

Quite apart from the power vested in him as Controlling Director, the role of de Valera was central to the early years of the *Irish Press*. In its publicity material, the founders of the paper declared that ‘the new Daily will not be a propagandist sheet or a mere party organ ... with the editorial policy of the paper under the sole direction of Mr. de Valera.’³⁷ According to his biographer Lord

³³ The founding directors were: Eamon de Valera, Controlling Director; teacher, Dublin; James Charles Dowdall, company director, Cork; Henry Thomas Gallagher, company director, Dublin; John Hughes, company director, Dublin; Philip Pierce, company director, Wexford; Stephen O’Meara, company director, Limerick; James Lyle Stirling, company director, Dún Laoighre; Edmund Williams, company director, Tullamore. Irish Companies Registration Office. Irish Press Ltd., Shares Register.

³⁴ Irish Companies Registration Office, *Irish Press* Articles of Association, Article 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Horgan, p. 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Longford, de Valera's political activities came second in importance to his *Irish Press* duties in the pre-publication days of 1930 and 1931. His diary notes for the time contain many references to 'late night at the *IP*'³⁸ Longford further states that when de Valera oversaw preparations for the first editions of the paper, he delegated most of the Fianna Fáil work to others, but 'with the paper he saw to everything himself.'³⁹

III

The *Irish Press* was launched on 5 September 1931 and in its first editorial it declared that it was 'not the organ of an individual, a group, or a party.' It added

We are a national organ in all that term conveys ... Our ideal, culturally, is an Irish Ireland, aware of its own greatness, sure of itself, conscious of the spiritual forces which have formed it into a distinct people having its own language and customs and a traditionally Christian way of life.

We have given ourselves the motto: Truth in the News. We shall be faithful to it ... Until today the Irish people have had no daily paper in which Irish interests were made prominent ... Henceforth other nations will have a means of knowing that Irish opinion is not merely an indistinct echo of the opinions of a section of the British press.⁴⁰

Public reaction to the new paper was initially enthusiastic. Its print run for the first edition was for 200,000 copies and quickly sold out. This eventually settled down to a daily run of 100,000 within five years.⁴¹ The existing newspapers responded in several ways. The *Irish Times* reprinted parts of the *Irish Press* first editorial while the *Irish Independent* ignored the paper completely and edited out its references to it from reports of speeches by Fianna Fáil politicians.⁴² Of greater consequences to the fortunes of the new paper was a

³⁸ The Earl of Longford and Thomas P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 1970), p. 274.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Irish Press*, 5 September 1931.

⁴¹ Horgan, p. 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*

decision by railway shareholders to veto a request by the *Irish Press* to use the special newspaper trains which distributed morning editions of all the national daily papers throughout the country.⁴³ This necessitated the *Irish Press* setting up its own methods of distribution, a network of hired cars and drivers, which added heavily to its costs.⁴⁴ The Cumann na nGaedheal government did not disguise its hostility to the paper. It banned *Irish Press* reporters for a time from meetings and declined to supply the paper with information on parliamentary debates.⁴⁵ While many in government wanted an outright ban on the paper, William Cosgrave believed it would, in time fade into obscurity and was best ignored.⁴⁶

From the beginning the new paper made it clear that its primary target readership was comprised of the two groups that provided Fianna Fáil with most of its electoral support: the urban working class and small farmers. Much of its success lay in the fact that it set out to ‘celebrate the life of the plain people of Ireland.’⁴⁷ The paper was, according to Hugh Lambert, available in every village and at every crossroads where every small shop had copies delivered by car, cart and bicycle.⁴⁸ Prior to that daily newspapers were only available in the larger towns. Lambert further claimed that ‘the ordinary man was not getting his paper, one paper was the wrong religion and the other was aimed at people with money. This was the perception.’⁴⁹ The *Irish Press* championed a frugal, simple lifestyle

⁴³ The Murphy family of the Independent Papers Group were major investors in the railways.

⁴⁴ O’Brien, p. 36; Horgan, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Peter Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands 1922-1939* (Dublin 2006), p. 85.

⁴⁶ Oram, p. 175.

⁴⁷ O’Brien, p. 36. Interview with Hugh Lambert, editor of the *Irish Press* 1987-1995.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

through its editorials, opinion pieces and advertisements. Local news was a hallmark of the paper.

The *Irish Press* layout was innovative. Its first edition carried national and local news on the front page. A photograph depicted Mrs. Margaret Pearse, mother of the 1916 leader Pádraig, starting the printing presses. She was surrounded by *Irish Press* directors, de Valera and a Catholic friar. Implicit in the image was the linkage between the new paper, Catholic Ireland and the ideals of the 1916 Republicans. Also, featured on the front page was trade union opinion on recent wage cuts to civil servants by Cumman na nGaedheal. The adjoining column, 'Speak Irish says Dr Hyde' reported on Douglas Hyde's belief on the necessity 'to use the Irish language to awaken our nationality.'⁵⁰ Prior to the launch of the *Irish Press*, the front page of the daily newspapers featured long lists of job vacancies, columns of lost and found articles, lists of properties for sale or rent, London stock market prices and advertisements for banks, money lenders and insurance agencies.⁵¹

On the inside pages his Irish language article was flanked by countrywide news and advertisements in English. In giving a prominent position to the Irish language, the *Irish Press* reflected Fianna Fáil's ambition to rejuvenate Irish as the spoken language of the country. Inside pages also covered articles on 'Irish Women in Industry' which emphasised the active role of working women in agriculture, manufacturing, transport and the professions, while 'The Lure of Grass to the Working Farmer' highlighted poor working

⁵⁰ *Irish Press*, 5 September 1931.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent, Cork Examiner, Limerick Leader, Munster Express*, various dates between 1916 and 1931. These also featured in the *Irish Press*, but were found within the paper.

conditions for agricultural workers in the Free State.⁵² Over two pages were devoted to sports predictions and results.⁵³ The popularity of the extensive Gaelic games coverage led other papers to follow suit.

By making its debut the day before the 1931 All-Ireland hurling final between Cork and Kilkenny, the *Irish Press* gave Gaelic games more coverage than any other newspaper. Novel features of the paper included a weekly serial by Patricia Lynch aimed at young readers called ‘The Turf Cutter’s Children’ and Aodh de Blacam’s ‘Roddy the Rover’ column, which according to letters published in the paper, delighted people when their village or area was mentioned in a national broadsheet.⁵⁴ De Blacam was the paper’s roving reporter who travelled to towns and villages throughout the country, writing a piece on each and much of this work featured in regional broadcasts on Radió Éireann in the late 1930s.⁵⁵

Advertisements for Irish-made or Irish-assembled goods dominated the pages of the *Irish Press* reflecting Fianna Fáil policy towards indigeneous industry. Prominent position was given to such advertisements especially those for Pierce Plough of Wexford and Tara Chocolate manufactured by Urney Limited of Dublin, the directors of both companies were also directors of the *Irish Press*. Photographic images of local landmarks such as the Rock of Cashel were an integral part of the paper. International attractions, for example, New York’s Brooklyn Bridge, Westminster Palace and Blackpool Tower also

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 9 October 1931, 26 November 1931 and 22 December 1931.

⁵⁵ Henry Boylan, *A Dictionary of Irish Biography* (3rd ed., Dublin, 1998) p. 98. Aodh de Blacam (Hugh Saunders Blackham) 1891-1951 was an Irish journalist, writer and a member of the Fianna Fáil executive council until 1947.

featured. Such images reflected Irish history and places where many Irish emigrants settled. The format of national and local news in English and Irish, trade union opinion, articles devoted to women's work and lives, literature aimed at young readers and extensive sports coverage continued in the paper until its closure in 1995. The *Irish Press* was also unique among Irish newspapers in publishing contemporary literature in both the Irish and English languages.

IV

Frank Gallagher was appointed editor of the *Irish Press* in 1931. De Valera chose a man with a strong pedigree in nationalist journalism as his journalistic career began with the *Cork Free Press*.⁵⁶ During the 1916 Rising, Gallagher was the editor of the *Cork Free Press*. His editorials were sympathetic towards the rebels and outraged at their treatment by the British government.⁵⁷ Following Sinn Féin's victory in the December 1918 General Election, Gallagher became a central figure in the 'mosquito press' of the time.⁵⁸ Gallagher moved to the *Irish Bulletin* in 1919, then under the editorship of Erskine Childers who insisted on unembellished truth in all articles.⁵⁹ 'Any exaggerations were cut out. All too-eager statements were brought down to a calmer note for he [Childers] was

⁵⁶ Aged twenty-one, Gallagher was appointed the paper's London correspondent shortly after the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. Gallagher had joined the Irish Volunteers in Cork in 1913 and his letters from London to his then girlfriend Celia Saunders show his pro-German stance. NLI, Frank Gallagher Papers, MS 18374: Letter to Celia Saunders, 2 September 1915.

⁵⁷ *Cork Free Press*, 31 March 1916 and 6 May 1916. The subsequent rise of Sinn Féin as the main nationalist party, eclipsed the influence of the Home Rule Party and led to the closure of the paper. It published its last issue at Christmas 1916.

⁵⁸ So named, he recalled because 'it was small, difficult to kill and had a sting that was remembered.' As soon as a publication was banned by the censor, it simply re-started under a different name and from a new location. It was, according to Gallagher, a game of cat and mouse between the presses and the British censor which treated the Irish reading public to a succession of newspapers with various name but similar content. Gallagher, *Days of Fear* (London, 1928), pp 348-50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 119-20.

a lover of facts, of the unembellished truth.⁶⁰ Following the closure of the paper in 1921 Gallagher moved to the anti-Treaty paper *An Phoblacht* where he worked until arrested. He spent most of the Civil War in jail where he wrote short stories and dramas. As a journalist, he was highly critical of the Irish daily newspapers which he claimed in his *An Phoblacht* articles to be ‘dishonest and hypocritical.’⁶¹

Gallagher took the position of publicity officer of the newly formed Fianna Fáil party and accompanied de Valera on his fundraising trips to the United States. Gallagher wrote stirring speeches for the party leader of whom he was a loyal supporter. In 1930, he formally applied for the job of editor of the *Irish Press* requesting a salary of £1,000.⁶² He was offered the position at the reduced salary of £850 a year, the first of many economies foisted on him by the board of the *Irish Press*.⁶³

As an editor Gallagher made his ideological direction clear. He instructed sub editors and reporters that

it was not necessary to report every word of praise spoken by judges to policemen; that courts and police alike were actively involved in the suppression of the remnants of the defeated Civil War forces, and frequently, the harassment of their sympathisers.⁶⁴

He rigorously stipulated that writers ‘emphasise aspects of news stories that feature women’s lives and work, and children’s interests’ being aware of how women and children’s desires were neglected by the other newspapers. In building a children’s readership he helped guarantee an audience for future

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 125.

⁶¹ *An Phoblacht*, 18 February 1921.

⁶² O’Brien, p. 30

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ NLI, Gallagher Papers, MS 19361.

years. Gallagher further added that writers were not to make the paper merely a Dublin press but to ‘forage news from all parts of the country.’⁶⁵ His general instruction to those writing and editing was, ‘Remember, Ireland matters most to the *Irish Press*.’⁶⁶ Such a populist approach appealed to readers as shown by steady circulation throughout the 1930s.

The emergence of the *Irish Press* was timely with the Great Depression at its height. People’s distrust of international high finance; the collapse of sterling and Britain’s forced abandon of the Gold Standard, all endangered Ireland’s economy because its currency was linked to an economy outside her control. The League of Nations was in disarray over its failure to rescue world trade, proving how vulnerable small nations, such as Ireland, were through being at the mercy of larger nation’s economies. These issues provided the newspaper with ample opportunity to make the case for Fianna Fáil’s programme of national self-sufficiency.

Gallagher’s editorials in the lead up to the 1932 General Election closely mirrored Fianna Fáil policy.⁶⁷ The paper supported calls for protectionist policies, called for an independent banking system and upheld Fianna Fáil’s demand for an Irish central bank after British banks forced an interest rate rise on their Irish counterparts in late 1931. There was also support for state intervention to decentralise industry as a means of providing widespread employment and to protect Irish industries against large-scale foreign production. These were all central to Fianna Fáil’s national programme.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Irish Press*, various dates between September 1931 and February 1932.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

As the General Election neared, the propaganda war amongst the daily newspapers intensified. Cumann na nGaedheal's appeal to voters was that the country had enjoyed peace and stability in the years following the Treaty and the creation of the Irish Free State. Government spokesmen, quoted by the *Irish Independent*, linked Fianna Fáil's policies of state sponsored rural industrialisation and protectionism with communism.⁶⁹ The *Irish Press* stated, in response, that Fianna Fáil's policy recognised the rights of the individual to own private property and land and it added that the government would provide work for the unemployed by establishing rural industries. Such policies, the paper argued were not socialism but were in fact advocated by Pope Pius XI in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* which denounced 'the reduction of society to slavery at the hands of capitalism.'⁷⁰

During the pre-election period in January and February 1932, one of the main topics discussed at length in *Irish Press* editorials was the treatment of I.R.A. prisoners and suspects by the Free State Government. Gallagher exposed systematic brutality against Republicans by the Garda Síochána, arguing that 'the beating of prisoners appeared to be becoming part of the system of government.'⁷¹ Gallagher also berated the poor conditions under which many prisoners were held in the Free State's prisons. At this time, attacks against the police were frequent and a Special Powers Tribunal was established in October 1931 to dispense justice, which in effect was martial law. Gallagher was brought before this tribunal on 5 February 1932 and charged with seditious libel because of his series of editorials. The prosecution charged that he was trying 'to bring

⁶⁹ O'Brien, p. 48.

⁷⁰ O'Brien, p. 48.

⁷¹ *Irish Press*, 5 January 1932.

the administration of the law into disrepute and to scandalise and vilify the Government and the Garda Síochána.⁷² Gallagher responded that his actions were fair criticism upheld by the testimonies of over fifty witnesses.⁷³ On the eve of the General Election, the paper and Gallagher were fined £100. *Irish Press* readers sent in over £500 in contributions to help pay the fine. O'Brien states that the trial and its outcome helped raise the public profile of the paper 'and it soon built up a reputation as the best paper in the country for hard accurate news.'⁷⁴

Gallagher's editorial following Fianna Fáil's triumph in the election was predictably exultant. He wrote that, 'All good Irishmen and Irishwomen have cause for rejoicing in the events which occurred yesterday in the Dáil.' He praised Fianna Fáil's majority of thirteen seats and accused the Cumann na nGaedheal government of being out of touch with the people.⁷⁵ The *Irish Press* had fulfilled the function de Valera had envisaged for it. It had given Fianna Fáil a platform from which to publicise its policies, challenged Cumann na nGaedheal and the newspapers which supported it, and helped Fianna Fáil into office. It also helped legitimise Fianna Fáil as the 'political wind of the cultural nationalist ideologies as published daily in the paper.'⁷⁶ Gallagher's editorials had been central to this success in promoting Fianna Fáil policies.

Once in office, Fianna Fáil set about implementing its programme of reforms. The *Irish Press* continued its role as party mouthpiece, supportive of the abolition of the oath, the withholding of land annuities, and promoting the

⁷² NLI, Gallagher Papers, MS 18361.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ O'Brien, p. 29.

⁷⁵ *Irish Press*, 10 March 1932.

⁷⁶ O'Brien, p. 29.

government's stand on the Economic War with Britain. When de Valera called a snap General Election in January 1933, the paper went into 'rhetorical battle on behalf of the government regarding the ongoing economic crisis.'⁷⁷ Fianna Fáil won seventy seats in this election giving them a clear majority. In a letter written to Gallagher in late October 1933, de Valera said 'had the risk of founding the paper not been taken, I doubt if the present government would be in power.'⁷⁸

As the paper's circulation continued to increase under Gallagher's leadership, he was also forced to issue a newspaper with fewer staff than his rival in the *Irish Independent*. In a memo to the board of directors he compares his staff to that of the *Irish Independent*; 'I have no Assistant Editors, the *Independent* has two; I have two leader writers, the *Independent* has five; I have ten subs, the *Independent* has twelve; I have a part-time Finance Editor, the *Independent* has a full-time one.'⁷⁹ Following months of acrimonious discussions with the board over these and ongoing financial difficulties and with little support from de Valera, Gallagher tendered his resignation at a meeting on 29 April 1935 which was accepted. He left the paper in July 1935. Horgan and Oram comment that de Valera's acceptance of Gallagher's resignation marked a turning point for the paper, and signalled a watershed between the old, campaigning paper of the early 1930s and a 'more popular, less overly political paper, one that was designed to appeal to the middle classes which were being attracted to Fianna Fáil.'⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Oram, p. 49.

⁷⁸ NLI, Gallagher Papers, MS 18361, letter from E. de Valera to F. Gallagher, 25 October 1933.

⁷⁹ Ibid: Memo dated 3 September 1933.

⁸⁰ Horgan, p. 35. Oram, p. 180.

Senator Joseph Connolly, a founding member of the *Irish Press* wrote the following:

Under Frank Gallagher's editorship the paper established itself as a trustworthy and reliable journal, bright without being cheap, cultured without being ponderous and above all Irish through and through in the things that mattered. It was to me a tragedy not only for the paper but for the country when Gallagher ceased to be editor. From that time the tone of the paper gradually deteriorated. A new and undesirable streak crept into its columns and has continued to grow until the present time...one looks back with nostalgia when Frank Gallagher, M.J. McManus and Aodh de Blacam gave the people the right lead and direction on all that really mattered in Catholic Ireland ... Gallagher's leading articles dealt with every aspect of the national situation and were, I think, the best contributions to national journalism since Arthur Griffith had written in the earlier years.⁸¹

With the establishment of the *Irish Press*, Fianna Fáil had the means of providing balance to what they believed was a biased media. The fund-raising campaigns for the paper organised in the United States, Australia and in Ireland helped strengthen support not only for the paper but also for the party. In the United States, de Valera's public appearances and speeches rallied his political sympathisers to help finance the fledgling party and its need for a strong media presence. At home, fund-raising dances, raffles and door-to-door collections also helped to build a community which supported a national daily newspaper which gave voice to groups who believed themselves neglected by the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times*, whose circulation outside Dublin was marginal. The *Irish Press* featured articles which appealed to two constituencies the Fianna Fáil party focused on: small farmers and the working urban classes, group who saw themselves unaligned from Cumann na nGaedheal policies and whose needs were not covered by the existing national daily papers. Sport was

⁸¹ NLI, Gallagher Papers, MS 18361, Connolly to Gallagher, undated typescript 1958.

given strong coverage especially Gaelic games forcing other papers to follow suit.

The populist approach adopted by Frank Gallagher in the editorial and leading articles in the *Irish Press* appealed to readers, which in turn benefitted the Fianna Fáil party from the publicity the paper afforded it. The relationship between the paper and the party was mutually beneficial; Fianna Fáil supporters subscribed to the paper, and the paper supported the ambitions of Fianna Fáil. As Lee states, 'The increased turnout at the general election in September 1927 from sixty-nine per cent to seventy-seven per cent in 1932, before rising to a record eighty-one per cent in 1933, probably owed a good deal to the popular enthusiasm generated by the *Irish Press*.'⁸²

The *Irish Press* and its contemporary rivals flourished as components of traditional communication media. However, radio broadcasting, the new medium of public communication, was developing internationally not only as a means of entertainment and education but also as a core element of nation building. The following chapter will examine the international debates surrounding the perceived influential nature of radio broadcasting. How the Irish Free State governments of the 1920s and 1930s responded to this new influence and its potential will also be considered.

⁸² Lee, p. 168.

CHAPTER THREE The Civic Duty of Radio

This chapter will explore how radio broadcasting was considered to foster ideas of national identity. It will question whether this concept was unique to the Irish Free State or if the responsibilities of radio broadcasting were being debated worldwide. Furthermore, how were governments, under the guise of educating and entertaining their populations using radio broadcasting to advance their national ambitions? To answer some of these questions comparisons will be made with how Canada and New Zealand established radio broadcasting stations. How the relationship between the Irish Free State and radio broadcasting developed throughout the 1920s will be considered. Particular emphasis will be placed on the impact of taxation on radio sets during this period.

I

Newspapers, and other forms of traditional print media, in the 1920s provided information about local, national and international events and offered opinions in the form of editorials and readers' letters. Advertisements were published for jobs and services, and readers were entertained by weekly instalments of popular novels – Zane Grey's *The Mysterious Rider* was serialised in hundreds of newspapers throughout America, Canada, and Britain.¹ Radio broadcasting offered the spoken word to audiences who listened to stories about adventurers such as Jack London's heroes.² Radio broadcasting also brought professionally

¹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA., 1988), p. 46.

² Jack London's novels about the Klondike Gold Rush were serialised and broadcast by Western Electric AT&T (WEAF) a New York City based radio station during 1922-23: David

performed classical music into lives that had seldom know it before as when Dame Nellie Melba gave a recital of excerpts from *La Bohème* in June 1923 for the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.)³ The children and youth of the 1920s and 1930s were a generation which grew up with the sound of radio and within its orbit of influence. A long running debate, at government level worldwide, began about the possible influence of media – such as radio broadcasting, cinema and popular music – on audiences.

One of the first countries to examine how radio could be a medium of civic instruction while also free from government scrutiny was Britain. Throughout the late 1920s a pattern emerged as private radio stations, dependent on advertisement funding, were scrutinised by government committees that were keen to uphold national concerns and to counter balance the influence of commercial interests. In Britain, as in other western countries, radio broadcasting became very popular during the 1920s with numerous independent stations being operated by radio manufacturers and enthusiasts. Many of these enthusiasts were former military radio operators who had trained in broadcasting during the Great War (1914-1918). This war had given impetus to radio communications through advances in broadcast technology and in training skilled technicians. However, as radio broadcasting became more popular military disquiet increased.

Radio wavelengths, previously used solely for military purposes, were interfered with by the sounds of popular music. Talks between the radio set manufacturers such as the Marconi Company and the Post Office which issued

Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition. American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford, 2011), p. 89.

³ Mark Hines, *The Story of Broadcasting House, Home of the BBC* (London, 2008), p. 17.

radio licences resulted in the setting up of the B.B.C. in 1922 as a commercial station which did not impinge on military needs. Debate followed on the subject of broadcasting's responsibilities and this led to the creation of the Crawford Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting in 1925. On its recommendations, the B.B.C. was transformed into a public service corporation funded by a licence fee, with no direct parliamentary control and with an emphasis on educational programmes.⁴

II

As radio broadcasting expanded its range of transmission and thus its scope of influence, the responsibilities of broadcasting were questioned and debated worldwide. By the mid-1920s radio appeared to shift from being a mode of pure entertainment and product advertising to one where ideas of national identity, citizenship and community could be fostered. The B.B.C. under the directorship of John Reith, became the model for national public radio broadcasting. In his 1924 book, *Broadcast over Britain*, Reith stated that radio broadcasting 'is a good thing which has the effect of making the nation as one man.'⁵ This concept became one of the B.B.C.'s guiding principles and was enmeshed with Reith's belief that radio's purpose was 'to inform, educate and entertain.'⁶ B.B.C. programming throughout the 1920s and 1930s reflected this philosophy. This was in contrast to American broadcasting which had become more focused on sponsors and advertising. This, for instance, was especially true of the oldest

⁴ Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford, 1985), p. 15. The committee was headed by the Earl of Crawford who would give valuable advice regarding broadcast funding to the Irish government.

⁵ John Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (London, 1924), p. 23. John Reith (1889-1971) was the Director-General of the B.B.C. from 1927-1938.

⁶ Ibid.

and largest stations WWJ founded in Detroit in August 1920 and Pittsburgh's KDKA which first broadcast in November 1920. Aimed at a mass audience popular entertainment influenced by the commercial marketplace triumphed over education and information or, as stated by Michele Hilmes, over the 'tasteful and the elite.'⁷

Canadian and New Zealand broadcasters (two countries often considered to be overly influenced by their larger neighbours the United States of America and Australia) played American programmes and took B.B.C. Empire programmes. Some members of their governments worried about protecting national cultures and interests. For instance, in 1926 questions raised in the New Zealand parliament by Charles MacMillan focused on the necessity to broadcast advertisements for Australian woollen products at a time when New Zealand sheep farmers were facing pricing difficulties due to cheap Australian imports.⁸ Similar questions continued to be brought before the New Zealand government where a proliferation of privately owned stations operated, all dependent on Australian investment and advertising revenue.⁹ In tandem with the Irish Free State during the late 1920s and early 1930s, New Zealand experienced a tentative development in radio broadcasting. New Zealand was, outside of the main cities, predominately rural and agricultural. Early radio broadcasting focused on local news and weather forecasting rather than entertainment.¹⁰ This changed as the number of privately owned stations

⁷ Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Belmont, 2007), p. 77.

⁸ Charles MacMillan (1872-1941) Reform Party Minister for Agriculture 1932-1935. NZ Ministry of Agriculture/R19984938/ADOE/16612MI/1100/13 August 1926 (<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1929/broadcasting/3>) (18 June 2016).

⁹ John Clarricoats, *The World at their Fingertips* (Wellington, 2000), p. 49.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

continued to grow in the late 1920s. With such rapid expansion came a demand for regulations of broadcasting from church groups, farmer organisations and private individuals who wanted radio broadcasting to be a medium ‘of national interest; of education and yes, of entertainment ... its civic duty is to reflect the character of daily life in our country.’¹¹ With the rapid growth of licence holders there was a continued belief in broadcasting as having a civic duty. This was discussed in parliament and through the editorials of the main newspapers. Fearing a decline in advertising revenue, the press supported a government funded public radio station whose remit was education, information and entertainment.

The concept of broadcasting as a social force was fully established with a change of government in 1935 when Labour first came to power. Its importance may be gauged from the fact that the Prime Minister, Michael Joseph (M.J.) Savage, assumed the portfolio of Broadcasting.¹² Taking the B.B.C. as a template and a key influence for New Zealand broadcasting, one of his first actions was to amalgamate the many private stations into a single commercial service overseen by ministerial scrutiny. The National Broadcasting Service, operated by the government provided information on agricultural, educational and cultural policies.¹³ This service also provided English language programmes targeted at newly arrived European immigrants and would in later years teach the indigenous Māori language.

¹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 October 1929.

¹² Michael Joseph Savage (1872-1940) was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1935 to 1940.

¹³ Clarricoats, p. 94; Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis, 2005), p. 254. The National Broadcasting Service would become the New Zealand Broadcasting Service in 1943 which in 1949 became Radio New Zealand with the advent of television broadcasting.

In Canada, the power of broadcasters, the greed of advertisers and the influence of American radio stations featured regularly in discussion about radio broadcasting throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1929, the Canadian Aird Royal Commission claimed that radio broadcasting would ‘undoubtedly become a great force in fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship.’¹⁴ Its interim report stressed Canadian broadcasting was to adopt the aim of ‘protecting Canada from a radio system like that of the U.S.A. and from excessive American content.’¹⁵ By 1930, Graham Spry, one of Canada’s foremost lobbyists for a national public broadcasting system, had already argued that American domination of radio broadcasting threatened Canada’s cultural integrity through aggressive product advertising and the playing of popular dance music and jazz.¹⁶ Spry’s comments echoed the finding of the Aird Commission when it concluded that Canada needed a publicly funded radio broadcasting system free from commercial advertising and modelled on the B.B.C. system. The result was the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in 1932 which existed until 1936 when it was reorganised as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (C.B.C.) At its establishment, Prime Minister Richard Bedford Bennett spoke of the need for public control of radio saying,

This country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Canadian sources. Without such control, broadcasting

¹⁴Aird Royal Commission on radio broadcasting in Canada. (<http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/researchpublications>) (12 July 2016)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ F.W. Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting, 1920-1951* (Toronto, 2009), p. 28. Graham Spry (1900-1983) was a Canadian broadcasting pioneer and founder of the Canadian Radio League which helped set up the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (C.B.C.) in 1936.

can never be the agency by which national consciousness may be fostered and sustained and national unity still further strengthened.¹⁷

One of the most challenging tasks was to provide a truly national radio service in a country with two official language. Some of the best-known English language programmes broadcast were *The Youngbloods of Beaver Bend* which serialised life on a western Canadian farm, *Hockey Night in Canada* and *Northern Messenger*, a weekly programme which focused on the lives of people – trappers, policemen, missionaries, teachers and loggers – living in the far north of Yukon and Northern Territories. Programmes aimed at the French speaking population of Québec and Montreal followed a similar pattern of locally produced drama, sports and news with the weekly drama *Canadian Cavalcade* broadcast in both French and English.¹⁸

III

In Ireland, radio broadcasting emerged at the same time as the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. As early as 1924 a parliamentary committee was set up to consider how best to proceed.¹⁹ The committee considered not only the educational and entertainment values of radio broadcasting but also how it could be a medium for nation building. They agreed that

It would be difficult of over-emphasise its value as an instrument of popular education. In connection with the spread of the national language and of the phonetic teaching of modern languages, so necessary to commerce, there is no agency which lends itself so readily to the wide and cheap propagation of knowledge ... Similarly,

¹⁷ *Toronto Star*, 3 November 1936.

¹⁸ Anne F. MacLennan, 'Learning to Listen: Developing the Canadian Radio Audience in the 1930s' in *Journal of Radio Studies*, xiii (2011), pp 85-103.

¹⁹ The committee was Pádraic Ó Maille (chair), Tomás MacEoin, Liam MacAonghusa, Liam Thrift, Seán MacGiolla Riogh, P.K. Hogan, Domhnall MacCathaigh, and R.H. Beamish. Darrell Figgis resigned from the Committee on 25 January 1924 due to a conflict of interest. DE, PD (vol. vi), 1924 Wireless Broadcasting, Second Report of Special Committee. 31 January 1924.

exposition for the reasons for and the application of new laws, lessons on the institutions of government and civics generally might be disseminated in an attractive fashion.²⁰

Many members of the government were impressed with the potential of the new medium and were keenly interested in how the service could fit into the ideological framework of the Irish Free State.²¹ The Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) recognised its importance in controlling the type of social, political and cultural programmes broadcast from an Irish service.²² The League lobbied for a national service to help restore the Irish language and in this they were supported by educators, intellectuals and politicians who all emphasised the need to allow Gaelic culture to flourish ‘unfettered from the oppressive domination of the foreigner e.g. Great Britain.’²³ During a Dáil debate on the issue, James Joseph (J.J.) Walsh, the Irish Post-Master General warned that the government risked surrendering Irish broadcasting to ‘British music hall dope and British propaganda.’ In a tart though, prescient, reply Major Bryan Cooper, responded ‘if we are to have radio broadcasting established on an exclusively Irish-Ireland basis, the result will be *Danny Boy* four time a week, with variations by way of camouflage.’²⁴

The form of these debates needs to be understood in terms of the cultural ethos of the nascent Irish Free State. Cultural policy during the early years of the battle for independence from Britain sought a radical rejection of all major elements of non-Gaelic identity. The language question was the most important

²⁰ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, vi, 1924. Wireless Broadcasting Report, Final Report of the Special Committee (28 March 1924).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Cork Examiner*, Letters to the Editor, 2 April 1924.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxvi, 1924. (4 April 1924) James Joseph (J.J.) Walsh (1880-1949) was Post-Master General, later Minister for Posts and Telegraphs of the Irish Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal from 1923-1927. Major Bryan Cooper (1884-1930) was an Independent and Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. for Dublin County from 1923-30.

cultural issue debated at official level. In 1924, the government announced its intention to co-ordinate, democratise and Gaelicise education, making the study of the Irish language a compulsory school subject. Given the emphasis on the Irish language revival policy in particular and Gaelic culture in general, the debates which focused on broadcasting policies are understandable. Those who believed radio broadcasting to be a viable instrument of gaelicisation had their ideals confirmed when at the launch of the radio station, 2RN, on 1 January 1926.²⁵ Douglas Hyde in his inaugural talk said

A nation is made from inside itself; it is made first of all by its language, if it has one; by its music, songs, games and customs...this much I have said in English for any strangers who may be listening in. Now, I address my own countrymen in our own language.²⁶

As Hyde continued his broadcast in Irish it is ironic that listeners outside Dublin could only hear him courtesy of a special relay broadcast by the B.B.C. because their signal was stronger and more widely available.

The B.B.C.'s Belfast station, 2BE, went on air some months before 2RN with its first broadcast on 15 September 1924. The two stations had, according to Rex Cathcart, cordial working relations and cooperated with each other on joint programmes.²⁷ Musicians and other performers from Dublin broadcast from Belfast. Colonel Fritz Brase, the Irish army's head of music conducted the B.B.C.'s local orchestra. The director of 2RN, Séamus Clandillon and his wife, Maighrėad Nı Annagáin, both well-known Irish traditional singers, gave

²⁵ Maurice Gorham, *Forty Years of Irish Broadcasting* (Dublin, 1967), p. 15. 2RN was the internationally recognised call signal given to the Free State Broadcasting Station in 1925 by the International Telegraph Union based in Geneva. 6CK was given to the Cork station. First used on 14 November 1925 when Séamus Clandillon, the station director, announced on air; 'Seo Raidió 2RN, Baile Átha Cliath ag tástáil' (This is Radio "RN, Dublin testing) Regular broadcasting began on 1 January 1926.

²⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 2 January 1926.

²⁷ Rex Cathcart, *The Most Contrary Region: The BBC in Northern Ireland 1924-1984* (Belfast, 1984), pp. 40-41.

recitals. Actors from the Abbey Theatre played leading roles in radio drama productions.²⁸

Programming policy in both stations was focused on entertainment through music recitals, adaptations of Shakespeare plays, popular radio dramas such as Richard Becks *The Comedy of Danger*, and weather reports.²⁹ Unlike the press, north and south, post-partition radio broadcasting at 2BE and 2RN did not reflect the political course of events. Radio broadcasting was not concerned with current affairs and, constrained as it was by competition from the press, only provided a minimal news service.

IV

From its inception 2RN was operated directly by the State, with both transmission and production run by employees of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. J.J. Walsh, as Post-Master General was strongly opposed to this, on the ground that his department could not possibly manage what would be an entertainment medium.³⁰ There was also extreme reluctance within the Department of Finance to fund radio broadcasting – evident from the final debates on the recommendations of the parliamentary committee which stated that both departments would have preferred a commercial service under government control.³¹

The compromise reached by the government was that broadcasting would be part-financed by listeners' licence fees and import duties on radio sets

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ NAI (DE.PD. vol.vi. 28 March 1924) Wireless Broadcasting- Final Report of Special Committee.

³¹ Ibid.

and their components.³² The annual recurring licence fee was settled at ten shillings per radio set while an import tax of twenty-five per cent was imposed on all radio sets and broadcasting equipment.³³ Advertising was confined to one short period at night.³⁴

In this way the Irish broadcasting system differed from both the British and American models. The United States had private operations, advertising and no licence fees. Britain had a public service transmission operated by a state appointed board – the B.B.C – licence fees and no advertising. The Irish system suited a country with a low population and one who was slow to take up radio ownership due to the high cost of radio sets.

Government control of 2RN inevitably led to some forms of censorship. Programmes relayed by the B.B.C. to Irish listeners, and which contained references to the health of the King, were interrupted leaving the listener with the sound of static.³⁵ Discourse on domestic politics was also censored. In 1926 a proposal that 2RN broadcast the budget debate ‘to stimulate interest in the proceedings of the Oireachtas’ was vetoed by the Executive Council who decided against any broadcasting of Dáil speeches ‘as radio broadcasting was not the place to influence the opposition.’³⁶ Prior to the 1927 election, Walsh had the station broadcast a party announcement on the merits of voting for Cumann na nGaedheal. Following complaints by the opposition parties the incident led to a decision by the Executive Council, the Departments of Posts and Telegraphs, and Finance to prohibit any broadcasts by political parties.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Horgan, *Irish Media*, p. 45.

³⁶ NAI, DT, S7321. Executive Council Minutes, 23 March 1926.

Furthermore, there was to be no mention of the Civil War, unemployment rates, immigration or sexual matters which could cause offence.³⁷ Programming was strictly cultural, social and non-ideological. Horgan claims that little formal censorship was needed as programming was bias in favour of non-partisan musical offerings.³⁸

With the agreement of the Department of Finance, the Department of Posts and Telegraphs agreed to allow Irish companies to advertise their products on radio. Advertisements were posted in all the national papers on 15 April 1926 stating that

The Minister for Posts and Telegraphs has arranged to have a period of five minutes allocated, in the nightly programme, on payment of a moderate fee, for the delivery of lectures advertising particular Irish industries...³⁹

The government's emphasis on advertising only Irish goods clearly shows how international debates on radio broadcasting informed the Irish model. Similarly, the fee for Irish advertisers was fixed at £5 per five-minute broadcast, while foreign based companies operating in the Free State, such as Siemens-Schukert, were charged £10 for the same amount of broadcast time.⁴⁰ Advertisements were to be broadcast only at the end of the nightly programme, immediately before the station closed down. According to Maurice Gorham, this scheme amounted to very little revenue with the total income being £165 for the first seventeen months of operation.⁴¹ By April 1928, revenue had dropped to £28 and the recently appointed Director, Séamus Clandillon, recommended that the scheme

³⁷ NAI, DT, S7324. Memo from Secretary, Dept. Posts and Telegraphs to Secretary, Dept. of Finance, 6 June 1927. The first political broadcast would not take place until 1954.

³⁸ Horgan, p. 50.

³⁹ *Cork Examiner, Irish Independent, Irish Times* 15 April 1926.

⁴⁰ Gorham, pp 7-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

be dropped believing that ‘from a programming point of view, advertisements are a nuisance, and are regarded by listeners as impertinence.’⁴² In the United States, this view was also shared by listeners who complained that serious programmes of national importance were cut short for inane advertisements.⁴³ However, Ireland with a small population of licence holders needed advertising revenue to fund its broadcasting station.

V

Once radio broadcasting began a ‘growing demand’ for radio sets was reported, there were ‘unequalled sales’ recorded during Christmas week of 1925.⁴⁴ In January 1926, imports of radio apparatus totalled over £22,000. By January 1927, this figure had fallen to £3,387 as a result of the imposition of *ad valorem* duty of 33⅓ per cent on all radio imports.⁴⁵ W.D. Hogan of Radio House on Henry Street in Dublin wrote to the *Irish Times* and stated that

owing to the imposition of this meaningless tax, three months after the Dublin station opened, the trade in crystal sets has been completely wiped out, and the demand for valve sets are few and far between...the people will not, or cannot buy and consequently the trader, the government, and the listener-in will suffer.⁴⁶

William Byrne, Honorary Secretary of the Wireless and Radio Retailers’ Association of Ireland, concurred that the trade was already ‘in a bad way

⁴² NAI, Dept. of Finance Report on Broadcasting Revenue, 17 April 1928. DFA/3/133/17/4/28. Séamus Clandillon (1878-1944) was the first Director of 2RN from 1925 to 1935.

⁴³ Hilmes, p. 15.

⁴⁴ *Irish Times*, 5 January 1926.

⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 March 1927. Wireless Telegraphy Act 1926

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 22 March 1927. Crystal sets were the cheaper form of radio apparatus which constricted the listener to using earphones and owing to their limited receiving capabilities functioned only in areas close to the broadcasting station. Valve sets were more powerful, not needing earphones, but were more expensive.

because of the import duty’, adding that the tax was ‘simply killing the trade, and indeed, all interested in broadcasting.’⁴⁷

In the absence of a domestic radio manufacturing industry, such a heavy import duty on radio apparatus was also very quickly regarded as a hindrance to the broadcasting service. The service was dependent on the licensing of sets and also on the revenue from the import taxation for its survival. In May 1926, Major Cooper, voiced his initial opposition for this taxation, which he believed, ‘was dissuading the use of the Irish broadcasting service as a commodity which was designed to be self-supporting.’⁴⁸ In Seanad Éireann, Thomas Westropp Bennett, a farmer and future chairman of the house, wondered if the government was ‘intentionally trying to diminish the influence of this almost essential mode of instruction as well as recreation.’⁴⁹ Bennett further questioned if the policy of the government was ‘actually intended to prevent the spread of broadcasting, as this tax is advancing such a policy.

The issue reached its zenith in March 1927, when a number of representations were made by various radio societies interested in the science and development of broadcasting to Ernest Blythe, then Minister for Finance.⁵⁰ Representatives from the Wireless and Radio Retailers’ Association of Ireland, the Cork Radio Association, the Wireless Society of Ireland, and the editor of the *Irish Radio Review*, requested that the minister discontinue the import duty ‘on the grounds that it had caused great hard to wireless and radio broadcasting development in the Free State.’⁵¹ The *Irish Times* claimed that broadcasting in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, vii, 732 (6 July 1926).

⁵⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 21 March 1927.

⁵¹ *Cork Examiner*, 21 March 1927.

the Free State had ‘failed to make the wide popular appeal expected’, and that ‘the authorities when informed that the programmes were unsatisfactory, explained that they were as good as the revenue from licences would allow.’⁵² The paper further claimed that the removal of the import duty, which it believed, was ‘crippling broadcasting’ could only lead to ‘an increased demand for new licences, more money for the programmes, and consequently a more popular broadcasting service.’⁵³

Blythe, however, did not succumb to public pressure and announced in his budget speech for 1927-28 that the tax was a good source of revenue for the government.⁵⁴ Much disappointment was expressed by those societies which had ‘given the question of the tax their careful consideration from every angle, and reached in all cases, the conclusion that the retention of the tax would be disastrous to Irish broadcasting.’⁵⁵

In 1927, Cooper again asked for the tax to be removed or at least reduced, iterating his belief that the tax was ‘checking development of the broadcasting service.’⁵⁶ William Thrift, who had sat on the initial Dáil committee on broadcasting and who was also vice-president of the Wireless Society of Ireland, agreed that unless the government took measures to ‘foster the development of broadcasting, and not retard it, it would be a long time before the required number of licences would be achieved to maintain the service.’⁵⁷

⁵² *Irish Times* 22 March 1927.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xix, 2275 (11 May 1927).

⁵⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 23 April 1927.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Terrence Atkinson of Birr, Co. Offaly in response to these reports by the *Cork Examiner* warned the government that

broadcasting was going to be the great educational and cultural medium of the world, and if those responsible really desire that we should keep abreast with other nations ...they will lose no time in removing the present tax on radio sets.⁵⁸

In Seanad Éireann, this belief was echoed by T. W. Bennett, who asked ‘if the government were intentionally dissuading people from using the radio’ as the tax prevented people from ‘enjoying a source of instruction and amusement which would be of the greatest possible assistance in alleviating the monotony of life in the countryside.’⁵⁹ Similarly in Dáil Éireann, Thrift, argued that if broadcasting was intended ‘to extend or improve the education of the country it had to be as accessible to the ordinary people as possible.’⁶⁰ Denis Gorey, a Farmer’s Party T.D. for Carlow-Kilkenny added ‘that radio broadcasting was of national importance, rather than just a business proposition.’ He further added that the tax prevented ‘rural people from engaging with the radio as a means of entertainment ... and that outside the larger towns there were no amusements of any description and no educational entertainments.’⁶¹ Gorey presented the bleakness of rural Ireland for his Dáil colleagues stating that

The people have nothing to do after a hard day’s work except to take up some work in their own home or sit down and do nothing. There are no concerts, no theatres, no cinemas, no music halls, no bands and they cannot listen-in to the central station as it is not within reach of a cheap radio set.⁶²

⁵⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 14 January 1926.

⁵⁹ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, vii, 732 (6 July 1926).

⁶⁰ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxv, 1101 (5 May 1926).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

The licence fee of ten shillings does not appear to have caused controversy and was generally accepted to be reasonable and ‘within the means of many thousands of people with limited means.’⁶³ In contrast, the poor reception was bemoaned by many and especially radio enthusiasts outside Dublin, who complained bitterly in the pages of the *Irish Radio Journal* and the *Irish Radio News*.⁶⁴ In the Dáil, Daniel Morrissey a Labour T.D. from Tipperary claimed that ‘radio reception outside Dublin was not always satisfactory and many complained that they were compelled to pay licence fees for a purportedly national service which they could not receive.’⁶⁵ Morrissey paid tribute to the station and in particular to the Director, Séamus Clandillon, who he believed ‘was providing a service which broadcast very good Irish musical talent that Irish people could be rather proud of.’⁶⁶

From 1928 onwards, official debates on radio broadcasting by government or opposition are sparse. Popular debate, carried on in the national and local newspapers and specialist magazines, focused on the poor quality of the radio signal with many listeners outside Dublin and Cork unable to get a clear reception. Once the high powered Athlone transmitter came into operation in 1932 this issue would cease to be of importance. Despite disquiet from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs about using the national radio service for denominational matters, funding for the transmitter became available to enable radio broadcasting of the closing ceremonies from the 1932 Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.⁶⁷ By this time over 30,000 licences had been issued in the

⁶³ *Cork Examiner*, 21 March 1927.

⁶⁴ *Irish Radio Journal* and *Irish Radio News* various dates between 1926 and 1932.

⁶⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxiii, 1287 (10 May 1928).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 29 April, 1932.

Irish Free State.⁶⁸ This was a very popular decision and demonstrates that Fianna Fáil, in this instance, used the national broadcaster as a means of furthering its ambitions as a voice for the people.

In conclusion, the Irish Free State was not alone in debating the responsibilities of radio broadcasting. Canada and New Zealand set up committees to debate what was perceived as the civic duty of radio broadcasting. Both countries wanted to separate themselves culturally from their larger neighbours, the United States and Australia, and considered radio to be a medium with the potential to foster national identity through programmes which reflected aspects of life particular to each country.

In the Irish Free State, as in Canada and New Zealand, the early debates focused on how radio broadcasting was of benefit to the nation and how this new service was to be financed and by whom, with advertising considered not to be in the national interest. The taxation of radio sets and apparatus was a contentious issue and was debated at length in the Dáil. These debates questioned the government's undertaking in the development of radio broadcasting. T.D.s who questioned this commitment, presented rural communities isolated from entertainment and the educational opportunities which radio broadcasting provided. Central to their frustration was taxation added to the cost of radio sets which resulted in a low uptake of radio licences, which in turn led to a deficit in funding for programming. Advertising continued to be a contentious issue and would continue to be so into the 1930s when a bias towards Irish goods was enforced. Simultaneous to official discussion, popular

⁶⁸ Ibid.

debate was carried on the national and local newspapers and specialist magazines and focused on the poor quality of the radio signal. Once the high powered Athlone transmitter came into operation in 1932 both these issues, advertising and reception would be re-examined.

Central to this scrutiny would be the perceived political interference by the Fianna Fáil governments of the 1930s. The following chapter will explore how radio broadcasting developed under the Fianna Fáil governments. It will explore what the impact of a new director had on the radio station, and will consider how the interests of the public and those of party policy were balanced.

CHAPTER FOUR

Radio Broadcasting and Nation Building in the Irish Free State during the 1920s and 1930s

Musical entertainment, considered by broadcasting stations as not being overtly political, was the staple of worldwide radio broadcasting in the 1920s.¹ This trend continued into the 1930s as outlined by Thomas Joseph (T. J.) Kiernan in 1935.² Did radio broadcasting become a force of social change? Were complex and nuanced nationalist agendas fostered under the guise of music appreciation radio programmes in the Irish Free State and in Europe? What constituted national interest in music programming? With the change of government in 1932 how were the ideals of Irish national interest accommodated with the need for advertising revenue? Was T. J. Kiernan successful in his ambitions for broadening the listener base through enhanced programming? How the desires of a wider radio listenership together with the introduction of sponsored programmes in the mid-1930s impacted on Irish radio broadcasting will be considered in the following chapter. Such perceived interposition by the government was articulated by W. T. Cosgrave in 1936 when, as leader of the Opposition he stated that ‘the broadcasting station is a place where the Government – Fianna Fáil – can pour forth their views – that it is really a propagandist institution.’³

¹ Briggs, p. 48. Goodman, p. 79 and Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public*, p. 36.

² Thomas Joseph (T. J.) Kiernan, ‘The Developing Power of Broadcasting’ in *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xv (1935), pp37-51. Kiernan (1897-1967) was seconded from the Dept. of External Affairs in May 1935 and appointed Director of Radió Éireann, a position he held until 1941. James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Directory of Irish Biography*, v: *Kane to McGuinness* (Oxford, 2009), p.177.

³ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxvi, 3 (26 March 1936).

I

In the 1930s, as radio's capacity to reach mass audiences expanded, broadcasting became an important social force. Rudolf Arnheim, who had written about radio in the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) since 1927, pointed to its capacity to 'break down the walls that currently segregate social, education, economic classes and geographical regions.'⁴ Such arguments supported the emergence of national public broadcasting stations across Europe whose programming emphasised high-quality culture through music recitals.⁵ Referencing Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Hilmes posits inter-war European radio broadcasting as 'a means for the circulation of narratives and representations in an era of nationalism' where radio broadcasting as a national service was the dominant model.⁶ At the same time, radio broadcasting offered new educational opportunities. Hilmes in her research described how debate in the Americas and Europe stressed the potential of radio 'to form and elevate public taste and the importance of reaching all classes.'⁷ Certain sounds, classical and traditional music in particular, were selected to best represent national qualities and used to construct national character. French radio

⁴ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London, 1936), p.182. Arnheim (1904-2007) was a visual theorist, art critic and social commentator. A German Jew, he emigrated to the United States where in 1941-42, he received a grant from Columbia University to study radio listenership: *The Independent*, 9 October 2007.

⁵ 1927- Radio Paris: 1930-Dutch Public Radio, Radio Toulouse and Radio Lyon: 1931- Rai Italia Radio: 1933- Radio Luxemburg. These were the first public broadcasting radio stations in Europe. Throughout the 1930s many private stations were established in European countries which in time came under state control. Prior to 1933, German radio broadcasting was dominated by private stations which slowly came under state control. Hilmes, 'Transnational Radio in a Global Age' in *Journal of Radio Studies*, xi, no.1 (2009), pp iii-vi

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

broadcasting, for example, in the 1930s consisted of nearly eighty-four per cent music, with priority given to the work of French composers.⁸

Ireland was no different. Gerald Boland, the recently appointed Fianna Fáil Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, told the Dáil in 1933, that ‘Irish traditional music was being given a prominent place in radio broadcasting.’⁹ While much of the music played under the administration of the Cumann na nGaedheal government was recognised as being traditional, generally satisfying the Irish-Ireland interests, this was the first public statement regarding such a policy for music programming.

Complaints regarding the quality of music continued to be voiced by parliamentary representatives from around the country on behalf of their constituents. Richard Anthony, a Cork independent Labour T.D., for example, complained that while there were

most elevating and interesting lectures on Irish music given on the radio by famous Irish musicians, there were very few competent exponents of it, with the same examples of ‘Phil the Fluter’s Ball’, ‘The Walls of Limerick’ and ‘The Blackbird’ being played over and over again.¹⁰

Anthony further added that it was ‘an insult to Irish music to have to listen to this every night and that such tedious tameness gave a bad impression of the resources of real Irish music.’¹¹ Richard Corish, a Labour T.D. for Wexford, agreed that more variety was needed with regard to traditional music ‘for as it

⁸⁸ Jann Pasler, ‘Writing for Radio Listeners in the 1930s: National Identity, Canonization and Transnational Consensus from New York to Paris’ in *The Musical Quarterly*, xx (2015), pp 212-262.

⁹⁹ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xlvi, 1257 (27 June 1933). Gerald Boland (1885-1973) was Minister for Posts and Telegraphs from 8 February 1933 to 11 November 1936.

¹⁰ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xlvi, 1383 (27 June 1933).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

stands, 2RN sounds more like a children's talent competition ...with repeated performances of varying degrees of quality.'¹²

James Dillon, the Centre Party deputy for Donegal, agreed and also suggested that 'getting the No. 1 Army Band to play every week would be the easiest way to improve the musical quality of the station's programmes.'¹³ He also recommended that Boland 'see to it that more good traditional singing be played on air as the numbers of beautiful singers in the country ought to be given the opportunity of broadcasting.'¹⁴ Boland, in response replied that 'there was a growing demand, particularly in country districts for more Irish music, particularly dance music with the nightly céilidhe music broadcast being specially appreciated.'¹⁵

Similar complaints and debates continued throughout the mid-1930s with some fractious opinions exchanged between members of Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil on how radio broadcasting was to develop its cultural remit.¹⁶ Michael Brennan, a Fine Gael T.D. for Roscommon announced to the Dáil that regarding the issue of traditional music 'the people of the nation realised that radio broadcasting had gone beyond the experimental stage, and had to be attacked boldly in order to catch up with other countries.'¹⁷ He further claimed that 'if the traditional music of this country was to be popularised, it was worth doing well with the very best performers and less repetition which is what really

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The Irish Radio Review*, July 1933.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xlvi, 1383 (27 June 1933)

¹⁶ Fine Gael was founded on 8 September 1933 as an amalgamation of Cumann na nGaedheal, the Centre Party and the National Guard. Meehan, p. 20.

¹⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lvi, 1020 (15 May 1935)

disgusts people.’¹⁸ His party colleague, Daniel Morrissey of Tipperary, added that ‘it was important to be critical of the programmes broadcast, for these were supposed to represent the culture of the country to the rest of the world.’¹⁹

These concerns and complaints were also debated in editorials and letters in the two specialist magazines, *The Irish Radio Review: A Journal of Radio Progress* and *The Irish Radio Journal*.²⁰ Both publications were mainly concerned with the mechanical workings of radio but from 1935 onwards also gave programme listings and critical articles on programme content. These weekly and monthly magazines and their international counterparts – *Radio News* (1919-59) in the United States, *Radio Times* (1923-2009) in the United Kingdom, and *Radio Magazine* (1922-39) in France among others – helped educated new listeners to radio and welcomed debate through letters and opinion pieces. In an Irish context, a long running series of letters criticised the prevalence of poorly played traditional music. For instance, R.J. O’Hagan of Summerhill, Co. Meath wrote that ‘he would smash his set into smithereens if he must listen to a jigged up version of Danny Boy again.’²¹ Other writers suggested that a way to improve variety was to play gramophone records ‘not necessarily of the modern or popular kind such as jazz, but of orchestral and other works, as the ordinary ear rarely knew the difference between live performance and good recording.’²² An anonymous writer from Co. Cork

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Both publications were founded in 1923. *The Irish Radio Review: A Journal of Radio Progress* changed its name to *Radio Review* in 1947 and became the *RTE (Raidió Telefís Éireann) Guide* in 1961 under which name it still trades. *The Irish Radio Journal* was published by the Radio Association of Ireland to further technical knowledge for amateur radio enthusiasts. In 1946 it changed its name to that of *Echo Ireland* and is still published as a subscription only magazine.

²¹ *The Irish Radio Review*, 27 June 1935.

²² Ibid. 15 July 1935.

suggested that ‘the broadcasting station should have a library of good recordings of complete operas and the like to be played as required.’²³ Interestingly, this suggestion was also discussed in the Dáil when Captain Sydney Basil Minch, a Fine Gael T.D. for Carlow-Kilkenny, outlined the benefits of having a library of recorded music.²⁴ This advice was acted upon the following year. Boland’s successor Oscar Traynor, announced to the Dáil that a gramophone librarian had been appointed and that ‘special gramophone recitals were given on the radio at least once a week.’²⁵

As the popularity of radio broadcasting increased so too did debate among listeners as to programme quality and content. While government policy favoured the predominance of traditional Irish music over other genres, public preference began to dictate the need for variety through the pages of the specialist magazines and increasingly through their local representatives.

II

Although the Irish broadcasting service was modelled on the B.B.C. it was different in one aspect. 2RN was a state operation financed solely by licence revenue and some advertisers who bought time on radio broadcasts. In contrast, the B.B.C. was a public-service operation managed by a state appointed board, financed by licence fees but with a complete ban on advertising. From the early 1930s in Ireland, there was, with the slow uptake of licences, a move towards sponsored programming, with various confectionary, cigarette and cosmetic companies spending £30 per hour on music programmes which they

²³ Ibid. 23 September 1935.

²⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxvi, 1575 (22 April 1937).

²⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxx, 1256 (31 March 1938). Oscar Traynor (1886-1963) was Fianna Fáil Minister for Posts and Telegraphs between November 1936 and 8 September 1939.

sponsored.²⁶ Concerns were expressed within the Dáil regarding the content of such programmes. Questions were also asked as to whether gramophone records were used or live artists, with the emphasis being placed on the employment of native Irish musicians.²⁷ Seán Lemass of Fianna Fáil, asked Ernest Blythe, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs if, in view of the ‘prevalent unemployment amongst musicians would the department consider insisting that all musical items in sponsored programmes broadcast by 2RN be supplied by native musicians and bands.’²⁸ Calls for the sole use of native music and musicians reflected the prevailing attempts to ensure the broadcasting of Irish music and culture.

Sponsored programmes frequently used popular or dancehall music, which was commonly referred to as jazz, to entice their audience. The playing of such music on imported gramophone records was interpreted by some as the introduction of modern foreign cultures associated with the products advertised. This concern was debated through a series of letters to the *Irish Press* throughout the summer of 1933 where the fear that British companies, unable to advertise on the B.B.C., were simply using the Irish station to advertise their products to people living in Britain. One writer asked listeners to ‘ignore the imported slush, the silly dances and filthy sounds ...we Irish Catholics do not want and will not have this so-called music.’²⁹

Whilst some of the complaints in these letters regarding sponsored programmes were clearly expressed in terms of ensuring the preservation of

²⁶ Gorham, p.64.

²⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxix (8 July 1931), Seán Lemass to the Dáil.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Irish Press*, 22 July 1933.

Irish moral values, others were subtler, expressing displeasure about the quality of music played. ‘Orchestral pieces that show love of country as with Jan Sibelius’ *Finalndia* or Bedřich Smetana’s *Má vlast* are of greater benefit to the people than the nonsense we are forced to daily hear.’³⁰ Such concern was also raised in the Seanad, when, for example, the trade union activist John O’Farrell stated that

a tremendous amount of terribly mediocre, cheap stuff was heard on sponsored programmes and the practice of handing over the station as a cheap advertising medium every evening was tantamount to a terrible admission that the government was unable to support a national broadcasting station.³¹

In contrast, James Dillon, Centre Party T.D. for Donegal, claimed that ‘the sponsored programmes, by the likes of Beechams, were the best on the radio and the music worth listening to.’³²

The policy on sponsored programming and advertising was reviewed in 1934 following the ‘war on Jazz’ waged by the Gaelic League with the support of the Catholic hierarchy. The Gaelic League declared that the playing of jazz music by the national broadcaster to be ‘against Christianity, learning and the spirit of nationality’ while Seán MacEntee, the Minister for Finance, was denounced by the League for ‘selling the musical soul of the nation for the dividends of sponsored jazz programmes.’³³ As early as 1931, senior hierarchy of the Catholic Church condemned modern and popular music, Cardinal McRory, for example, in his Lenten Pastoral objected to ‘suggestive and

³⁰ *Irish Press*, 28 July 1933.

³¹ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xvii (20 July 1933)

³² *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxviii, 1383 (20 July 1933)

³³ *Irish Times*, 12 January 1934. Mohill, Co. Leitrim became the centre of the League’s Anti-Jazz campaign when on New Year’s Day 1934, the parish priest, Fr. Peter Conefrey led over three thousand people in protest at ‘the spread of jazz in dancehalls and on the radio which defiled the Irish faith and Irish music.’

demoralising music'.³⁴ Such was the disquiet surrounding popular music that in 1934, the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, Dr. McNamee posited the formation of a non-political body, under the aegis of the Catholic Church, along the lines of the French Jeunesse Agricole Catholique. His main aims for this body were to stimulate interest and study in agriculture and also to promote Irish music 'against the tide of popular music which saps the spiritual and temporal ideals of Irish boys and girls.'³⁵

Sponsored programmes, playing foreign music advertised goods that were often of British origin. As such, the scheme was considered by Fianna Fáil T.Ds 'to be inimical to the government's avowed policy of promoting Irish industries and Irish goods.'³⁶ As part of the review of sponsored programming, Boland announced that the broadcasting station would accept 'only advertisements relating to Saorstát products and enterprises' adding that 'there were obvious objections on the grounds of national policy to the broadcasting of non-Saorstát products from the state station.'³⁷

The following year, Boland's successor, Oscar Traynor, highlighted the fact that only one hour a day was given over to sponsored programming.³⁸ Traynor emphasised that the main sponsored programme was run by an Irish company, the Irish Hospital's Trust, who used Irish musicians with some gramophone recordings.³⁹ This company was free to play whatever music they chose and the only control which the station director exercised over the music

³⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 12 March 1931.

³⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 18 January 1934.

³⁶ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lvi, 1016 (15 May 1935). Gerald Boland to the Dáil.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxvi, 1584 (22 April 1936).

³⁹ *Ibid.* The Irish Hospital's Trust, sponsored the Irish Hospital's Sweepstake's programme to promote the sale of tickets for the Irish Sweepstake.

content was to ensure that ‘there was nothing objectionable played.’⁴⁰ Traynor’s party colleague, Thomas Kelly, representing Dublin South, argued that the material played on the programme was ‘principally jazz stuff’ and that there was ‘very little Irish music.’⁴¹ Traynor replied that ‘the music was of a varied character, but that because objections were raised in the Dáil the matter would be looked into.’⁴² However, nothing was done to change the situation and the Hospital’s Trust programme proved to be one of the most popular on the radio for many years.⁴³

The controversy surrounding sponsored programmes and the subsequent review of advertising policy prompted Traynor and the Minister for Finance, Seán MacEntee to consider how to transform into a more popular station. In response to Seanad questions, MacEntee said: ‘With regard to the broadcasting service, I think that those ... who have experience of the service must admit that it has not been on the whole satisfactory to the public or to the government.’⁴⁴ He went on to announce the appointment of a new director, T. J. Kiernan, who, he confidently predicted, ‘would open up a new era.’⁴⁵

III

T. J. Kiernan replaced Seámus Clandillon as station director in 1935. He was joined by Frank Gallagher, former editor of the *Irish Press*, as deputy director. Cathcart and Muldoon refer to this appointment as ‘a coincidence of purpose between the radio station and the newspaper.’⁴⁶ Similar to how the *Irish Press*

⁴⁰ Gorham, p. 89.

⁴¹ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxvi, 1584 (22 April 1936).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Gorham, p. 89.

⁴⁴ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xix, 1461 (27 March 1935).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Cathcart and Muldoon, p.684.

championed newspaper coverage of Gaelic games, Irish language stories and opinion pieces, Gallagher and Kiernan began to reform the broadcasting schedule of programmes. Plays, sketches and talks in Irish supplemented Irish language classes. The number of outside broadcasts were increased, not only to cover more G.A.A. events but also to include local traditional singers, musicians and storytellers which helped to dispel the predominance of Dublin interests in programming. Farming programmes were also changed.⁴⁷ Kiernan introduced the concept of farmers talking about their working lives, their environment and the changes they experienced as farming gradually became more mechanised. The voice of the farmer replaced that of the government official. The changes brought about to programming, as well as the improvement in reception, as well as the improvement in reception helped increase the number of licence holders to over one hundred thousand within two years of Kiernan's appointment.⁴⁸

Kiernan outlined his ambitions for radio broadcasting in a far-ranging speech given to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (S.S.I.S.I) in December 1935.⁴⁹ In accordance with government thinking Kiernan emphasised that 'it is the proper function of national broadcasting authorities to give national programmes to their listeners.'⁵⁰ While he agreed with Fianna Fáil policy on broadcasting Irish traditional music he also questioned such an emphasis by stating that 'merely to be traditional is not to be constructively

⁴⁷ Michael O'Hehir was appointed by Kiernan to do outside broadcasting of G.A.A. games and horse racing in 1938. O'Hehir continued to broadcast until 1985. Gorham, p. 120.

⁴⁸ Gorham p. 185.

⁴⁹ The S.S.I.S.I. was founded in Dublin in 1847 as an all-Ireland body which analyses the major changes that have taken place in population, employment, legal and administrative systems and social services. Its findings are published in the *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*. Kiernan's lecture 'The Developing Power of Broadcasting' and subsequent discussion notes were published in the 1935 issue. NLI, *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xv (1935), pp 37-51.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

national ...playing the works of Irish composers, fantasias on Irish airs with the Londonderry air ad nauseam, are just not good enough.’⁵¹ He further added that Irish broadcasting has an important function in stimulating an interest in all kinds of music.’⁵² His comments and ideas were welcomed by the editorial committees of the specialist radio magazines who applauded Kiernan for being familiar with international radio broadcasting direction. ⁵³ In keeping with contemporary international broadcasting policies, Kiernan stressed how radio broadcasts enabled music appreciation and music education through talks and discussion groups. He posited that such broadcasts enabled listeners ‘to educate themselves through active and informed listening.’⁵⁴ Kiernan, though nationalist was not an isolationist and believed that ‘broadcasting can no longer be kept with the boundaries of a nation. Listeners recognise no boundaries.’⁵⁵

In his lecture Kiernan also paid attention to a much-discussed topic of 1930s radio broadcasting – propaganda. Radio broadcasting was, according to Hilmes, the most successful form of medium to combine entertainment, news, advertising and propaganda.⁵⁶ Hilmes quotes Joseph Goebbels belief that ‘what the press has been in the Nineteenth Century, radio will be for the Twentieth Century.’⁵⁷ As an addition to his belief in the power of radio broadcasting, Goebbels introduced an affordable and widely available radio set in 1933, the *volkempfänger* (people’s receiver) which broadcast Nazi policies and propaganda throughout Germany.⁵⁸ In contrast, Kiernan said ‘selling

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *The Irish Radio Review*, 20 December 1935.

⁵³ Ibid. *The Irish Radio Journal*, 20 December 1935.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 21 December 1935.

⁵⁶ Hilmes, ‘Transnational Radio in the Global Age’, p. v.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

propaganda is not the work of a broadcasting authority ... The wealthy countries and the colonising countries are doing it. The so-called Great Powers are pressing their broadcasts on the smaller nations.'⁵⁹ He further stressed this point when he said that 'Broadcasting policy in Saorstát Éireann is completely unfettered.'⁶⁰ His statement emphasised the independent nature of the station, in that there 'is no competition with privately owned stations geared towards profit or ideology.'⁶¹ He reinforced this point in the accompanying discussion when he said

the broadcasting authorities were unfettered in so far as interference from the Government and the Department of Posts and Telegraphs was concerned ...The authorities had, of course, to censor anything that would offend against decency, morality or religious feeling, but nothing censorable had come his way.⁶²

Were Kiernan's clearly defined ambitions for radio successful? His reforms of programming were impressive as can be seen from a study of radio programme schedules in the national papers between 1936 and 1939. Musical entertainment was still at the heart of programming with a range of traditional, orchestral, light classical and opera broadcast. News, both in English and Irish featured, as did talks on citizenship, Irish mythology, film appreciation, comedy, and language programmes in French and German.⁶³ The range of programmes was similar to those broadcast by the B.B.C. and European stations which were easily accessed by listeners in the Free State. Kiernan's reforms were praised both at government level and within the pages of the main newspapers with

⁵⁹ Kiernan, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 16 October 1936; 24 November 1936; 3 December 1936. *Cork Examiner*, 18 May 1937; 20 July 1937; 23 November 1937. *Irish Press* 5 January 1938; 22 February 1938. *Irish Independent* 20 March 1939; 7 April 1939, 16 June 1939.

robust admiration from the specialist magazines. An editorial in *The Irish Radio Review* complimented Kiernan on his 'far-sightedness and awareness of what the audience wants, not just that which is amendable to the government.'⁶⁴ The editorial also commended him on his efforts to raise the standard of music education and appreciation through the schools programmes.⁶⁵

One of Kiernan's achievements was the introduction of a dedicated schools broadcast. He persuaded the Department of Education to realise the importance of radio as a medium of education. In 1936, the department inaugurated a series of programmes for the purpose of teaching music in primary schools in co-operation with the Department of Defence. The programmes consisted of works played by the Army Bands with commentaries on the instruments played and on the lives of the featured composers.⁶⁶

A more varied series of programmes was put in place in 1937 with performances and commentaries by the Dublin Metropolitan Garda Céilí Band and the Irish language singer Pilib Ó Laoighre. Oscar Traynor congratulated Kiernan on this achievement and stated that

the particular type of education received by means of a radio broadcast was not typical to what they get in school and thus the very reason for such use of the broadcasting medium. It brings Irish poetry and Gaelic songs Irish history in ballad form to the classroom.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *The Irish Radio Review*, 23 September 1938.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Radio Éireann Report for 1936*, p. 6 as quoted by Gorham pp 92-97. Annual reports were inaugurated by Kiernan from 1936 but, as Gorham points out, there are serious difficulties in assessing the statistical information presented on the diverse genres of music broadcast. Sponsored programmes, for example, were generally not included, as they were not technically produced by the station and all gramophone music was considered as light music, a term which was not defined or distinguished in any way from serious music.

⁶⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxx, 1257 (31 March 1938).

Were these programmes successful? Marie McCarthy observed that the programmes were not only successful but were significant ‘in promoting a variety of Irish musical traditions, and in serving to mediate between official nationalist policy and the musical education of the nation’s youth.’⁶⁸ By 1938, there were approximately 400 hundred primary schools, out of a total of 5,100 regularly availing of the schools music programmes.⁶⁹ This number increased to 700 by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.⁷⁰ However, the scheme was limited to schools with access to a radio set, which the Department of Education did not and probably could not provide. With the onset of the war and the consequential unavailability of batteries and valves for radio sets, only 76 schools participated in the 1941 scheme. This resulted in the cancelation of the series. However, music programmes aimed at children continued to be broadcast on the regular schedules.⁷¹

The nationalist agenda, common to both Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil, of fostering all aspects of Irish culture was evident in radio broadcasting throughout the 1920s and 1930s through its programme content which focused on traditional Irish music, Irish history and Irish language broadcasts. Radió Éireann, in line with international practices provided a service which educated through entertainment, for example through music recitals. Like its European counterparts, for example France, the stations focus

⁶⁸ Marie McCarthy, *Passing it on: The Transmission of Music in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1999), pp 122-4. This writer’s aunt believed that such a musical education fostered a love of and appreciation of diverse music genres. It was, she claimed, quite normal to appreciate and take part in opera, orchestral music, and traditional Irish music. She attended a small primary school in a working-class district of Cork city and remembered the ‘radio classes’ very clearly.

⁶⁹ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxx, 1257 (31 March 1938). Thomas Derrig, Minister for Education in response to James Dillon.

⁷⁰ McCarthy, p. 122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

on Irish music helped instil nationalist ideology. Public dissatisfaction with such programming was debated within the Dáil and the media. In the Dáil, tacit agreement between government and opposition T.D.s was a feature of discussion on the role of broadcasting and how best to foster its development which was considered an important element in the on-going project of nation building. As radio broadcasting grew, listeners' dissatisfaction with the emphasis on Irish music was articulated through their T.D.s at government level and through the pages of newspapers and specialist magazines. The appointment of Kiernan and Gallagher to Radió Éireann led to a greater awareness of listeners needs to hear more contemporary music, plays and discussions on topical issues such as modern farming practices. Kiernan, in particular, as Director of Radio Éireann appeared to have balanced listeners desires with the government's nation-building ambitions in programming changes which included schools music appreciation broadcasts, outside sporting broadcasts and a wider variety of music genres played. Gallagher's experience as editor of the *Irish Press* in introducing Gaelic games coverage and articles which focused on peoples' lives and neighbourhoods was also reflected in these programme changes.

The musical content of sponsored programmes, which initially advertised British made goods, was reviewed to concentrate on those programmes which were sponsored by firms making or promoting Irish goods and services. This review of programming was in line with government policy in supporting Irish industry and cannot be solely considered as propaganda for Fianna Fáil ambitions. Support for Irish goods was in the national interest, in the interest of lessening unemployment thus raising the standard of living for as many people as possible. Cosgrave's comment on the station being a voice for

Fianna Fáil propaganda appears disingenuous in light of the station's commitment to advertise Irish goods at a time of increasing unemployment and emigration.

CONCLUSION

Propaganda and communication, nation building and community, these are the concepts which surround discussion on the early years of the Fianna Fáil party, the founding of the *Irish Press* and the development of radio broadcasting throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Fianna Fáil sought to build a supportive voter base aligned to their aspirations for national self-sufficiency. The *Irish Press*, from its inception was a platform for Fianna Fáil to communicate those aims. Radio broadcasting, on the other hand, often united government and opposition parties in the debate surrounding the influence of mass communication at a time of nation building following independence from British rule. How Fianna Fáil, through its use of print media and influence on radio broadcasting policies, created a community of readers and listeners can be considered as a clear example of Benedict Anderson's premise that a nation is a socially constructed community.¹

The founding of the Fianna Fáil party in 1926 aimed to give voice to social groups who perceived themselves unaligned with government policies – chief among them being small farmers, farm labourers and the urban working class. Such groups were attracted to the party's ambitions for agrarian and industrial development and to social policies which promised better housing a critical issue at the time. Founding members looked to those who were respected and liked within their communities – often a local hurler or footballer, an inspiring teacher or a former comrade from the War of Independence or Civil

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), p. 16.

War – to further their cause. For the most part, traditional local elites were eschewed; the solicitor, the doctor and particularly the larger landowner who were perceived to champion the policies of the incumbent Cumann na nGaedheal government. Fianna Fáil fought the 1932 General Election with programmes which proposed building houses, protecting Irish industry, combating unemployment and retaining the annuities that Irish farmers paid to the British government as repayments of land purchase loans received under the Land Acts.

As the fledgling party canvassed for support the contemporary press, apart from the *Irish Times*, either ignored or derided its ambitions. Awareness of how the press could either further or scupper the party's aims was acute among the founders in their quest to communicate their goals. Once the fundraising drive to establish the *Irish Press* got under way, Fianna Fáil's support base grew to include a new business class who were attracted to the opportunities presented by the party's economic policies. Their products, including farm machinery, footwear and clothing, were manufactured in the Free State and featured regularly in advertisements in the *Irish Press* once it was launched on 5 September 1931. In the lead up to the General Election of 1932, Fianna Fáil's policies for government were discussed and debated, not surprisingly with a positive bias, through editorial comment and in the letters page of the newspaper. The party attained power in 1932 and with the continued support of the *Irish Press* remained in office until 1948.

Was the *Irish Press* an innovative newspaper? It offered a greater variety of news and articles than its rivals the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Times*. It had a dedicated Irish language section which satisfied the desires of language

enthusiasts. Its children's section featured stories in Irish and English as well as cartoons, art appreciation and imaginative writing competitions. By encouraging the reading habits of children, whose parents were already supportive of the newspaper, the *Irish Press* aimed to foster and sustain future patrons. The *Irish Press* reported on all sports with extensive coverage of Gaelic football and hurling, events which were rarely covered by the other national daily papers. This all-encompassing and innovative attitude to sport was a major factor in the growth of the paper. The *Irish Press* not only communicated Fianna Fáil ambitions, it also reflected the interests of its readers and in so doing built a community of readers who also supported the party's aspirations.

The civic duty of radio broadcasting as part of nation building policy was debated internationally during the inter-war years. International discussion focused on the role of radio broadcasting and on the anxiety which surrounded the influence of mass communication on populations. Brian Farrell stated that

distrust of the media, the concern and confusion about the effects of mass communications ... is not new. It can be traced back to the fear of the radical press in the early eighteenth century, through elite reaction to the vulgarity of popular entertainment.²

The premise that radio broadcasting was to educate rather than just entertain was deeply ingrained in discussion concerning radio programming, hence the emphasis on classical music, opera and music appreciation over more popular forms of entertainment such as radio dramas and dance music.

Irish broadcasting was no different to its international colleagues in this regard. As Director of Radió Éireann, Kiernan played a significant role in

² Brian Farrell, 'Communications and Community: Problems and Prospects' in Brian Farrell (ed) *Communications and Community in Ireland* (Dublin, 1984), p. 112.

balancing listeners' desires with the cultural aspiration of government, particularly during the 1930s when listenership increased and entertainment became more evident in programme schedules. Kiernan, as aware of the power of radio as Lemass was of the power of the press, addressed the civic duty of radio by stating that 'there is always, behind the intelligent construction of broadcast programmes, the sense of social responsibility.'³ The civic duty of radio broadcasting, in an Irish context, was one of fostering Irish culture, through programmes which prioritised Irish language, traditional music and Gaelic sport. Both the Cumann na nGaedheal and the Fianna Fáil governments of the inter-war period supported these aims through their respective policies on broadcasting.

Did Fianna Fáil overly influence radio broadcasting as argued by Cosgrave? This is debateable. Once Cosgrave raised the issue in the Dáil, the ensuing discussion revolved around the content of sponsored programmes which had been revised in 1934 to only broadcast advertisements relating to Saorstát products and industries. Prior to these reforms, British companies, Beechams Powders and Pears Soap among others, had advertised on the Free State station leading to complaints from the Gaelic League, members of the Dáil and the Catholic hierarchy as to the playing of dance music rather than traditional Irish airs. Listeners, according to the evidence in newspapers and specialist magazines, wanted to hear popular music and the continued use of radio time ensured that such music was heard nationally and that licence fees continued to be paid. The Minister responsible for broadcasting, Gerald Boland, revised the policy on radio advertising on the advice of his Fianna Fáil

³ Kiernan, p. 40.

colleagues who themselves took advice from their constituents. The compromise reached was to continue with some popular programmes such as the Irish Hospital Sweepstakes broadcast and those programmes which only advertised Free State goods and services and who also played a wide variety of music.

While it is true that protectionist policies for Irish industries were put in place by the Fianna Fáil governments during the 1930s, the emphasis on broadcasting Irish culture, history and language had already been put in place by the Cumann na nGaedheal government on the introduction of radio broadcasting in the 1920s. Broadcast programming in the early years of the Irish Free State, while focused on Irish culture, was to all intents and purposes apolitical in the aftermath of the Civil War. The ideals of nation building through the medium of radio were already in place before sponsored programming rekindled the debate as to what should be heard and promoted on the national airways.

Fianna Fáil, it can be argued, was more aware of popular desires through their direct experience of founding a political party which targeted and answered the needs of certain groups within Irish society. In establishing a newspaper which aimed, through its editorials and articles to educate and entertain such groups, it fostered as a symbiotic relationship between its readers and its voter base. Similarly, its governing ministers listened to and responded to constituents' demands for better and more interesting radio programmes. The conflicts and compromises which surrounded radio broadcasting were influenced by Fianna Fáil's response to popular critique of the broadcasting station. The government's response was to limit but not exclude popular

sponsored programmes which ensured continued listenership. From its inception in 1926 and throughout the inter-war years, Fianna Fáil built a supportive community through innovative use of the traditional press and through compromise on existing broadcasting policies for the new medium of radio. In doing so, the party gave voice to groups which had originally considered themselves outside government direction. The party founded the *Irish Press* to further its political agenda and recognized the growing influence of radio broadcasting on society. Fianna Fáil's awareness and usage of media was both propagandist and communicative. The *Irish Press* and 2RN were used by the Fianna Fáil party to extend its scope of influence through editorials, programming and advertising content. The research points to an organisation which skilfully merged popular needs and desires with its own ambitions for government.

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