

Notes and Draft Analysis—Jim Smith

National Archives, Taoiseach Department, File: TSCH/3/S3729—Census of Production, 1926

File Contains:

Draft typescript “Preliminary Reports” for all industries and trades—none of the original “Returns” from businesses are included, but these may exist in Department of Industrial and Commerce Archive Files?

Department of Industry and Commerce, Census of Production, 1926
Preliminary Report, No. 24
Laundry, Dyeing and Cleaning Trades

Survey of industries operating in the Irish Free State carried out under “Statistics (Census of Production) Orders (Statutory Rules and Orders No. 46, 1926 and No. 63, 1927) made under the Statistics Act, 1926.

Returns were received from 80 Establishments engaged in Laundry, Dyeing and Cleaning Trades in the Aerostat in 1926.

Returns from 37 of the total (80) referred to Institutions (Convents, Penitentiaries, Female Industrial Schools, etc.). This figure (the 37 Institutional laundries) quantifies for the first time the state’s awareness of the number of private and charitable institutions across the Saorstát engaged in commercial laundry work for which the workers (typically women, and here referred to as “inmates”) were not paid for their labour. This number far exceeds the 10 acknowledged Magdalene institutions. Even if one includes institutions from which survivors are currently engaged in lobbying for Redress (e.g., Bethany Home, Stanhope St., Henrietta Street, Newtownforbes, Athy, Wexford, etc.), it is still difficult to arrive at 37 institutions. Again, further examination of Department of Industry and Commerce Files might throw further light on this issue?

“It was decided to exclude from the Census of Production figures related to these 37 establishments.” There is no further information as to how this decision was arrived at?

The amounts charged to customers for laundry work done by the 37 Institutions was £97,325. The other 43 establishments included in the Report charged a total of £470, 476 to customers. Therefore the total amount charged to customers for laundry work in the Saorstát in 1926 was £567,801. Laundry work carried out at the 37 Institutions therefore represented 17.14% of that total amount.

Private laundries attached to Hospitals, Asylums, Hotels, Boarding Schools, etc., and not working for the general public were not required to furnish Returns.

According to the Census of Population (1926) Returns, 4,025 persons described themselves as following the occupation of “Laundry Worker.” Of this number, and this

includes the returns from the 37 institutional laundries, some 3,500 persons described themselves as “industrial worker” as distinct from clerical and managerial staff.

It is important to note that the Returns received and included in the Summary detail information including: Gross Output, Material Uses, Net Output, Salaries and Wages, Persons Employed (broken down by gender and age), Time in operation, and Capacity of Engines.

The Returns received from the 37 Institutional establishments, while not included in the Report, very likely contained the same information, especially as the Report does include the Gross Output for these Laundries (£97,325). Accessing these 37 Returns, if they have been preserved in Department of Industry and Commerce files, would provide valuable insight into the commercial operation of these establishments.

National Archives, Taoiseach Department, File: TSCH/3/S7402—Census of Industrial Production, 1929

File Contains:

Saorstát Éireann, *Census of Industrial Production, 1926 and 1929 compiled by the Department of Industrial and Commerce*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1933

p. 149, Section III, Services. (28) Laundry, Dyeing and Cleaning Trades

The published version of the Census of Production states at the very beginning of the section that:

When taking the Census for these trades it was decided that Returns should not be required from the following types of establishments, and accordingly, this Report does not include the value of laundry, etc., work performed by them.

- (a) Convents, Penitentiaries, Industrial Schools, etc., which, as well as executing laundry for their own inmates and staffs, did work on a commercial basis for outside customers.
- (b) Private Hospitals attached to Hospitals, Asylums, Hotels, Boarding Schools etc., which did not carry out work for the general public.

There is an obvious discrepancy here between the “Preliminary Report” and the “Published” version.

The Preliminary Report signals possession of the 37 Returns from Institutional Laundries, although it decides not to include the information therein.

The Published Report suggests that Returns “should not be required” from such institutions, and therefore it reproduces none of the information contained in the Preliminary Report (e.g., that 37 Returns were received from such institutions, the gross value of laundry work thereat, etc.).

While one might speculate as to why the information from Institutional Laundries “should not be required,” the decision appears to run counter to both the spirit and intent of the Factory and Workshop Act, 1907 (the governing legislation at the time), which explicitly includes institutional and convent laundries under its ambit:

Factory and Workshop Act 1907

Section 5 Application of Factory and Workshop Act to certain institutions

(1) Where in any premises forming part of an institution carried on for charitable or reformatory purposes, and not being premises subject to inspection by or under the authority of any Government Department, any manual labour is exercised in or incidentally to the making, altering, repairing, ornamenting, finishing, washing, cleaning, or adapting for sale, of articles not intended for the use of the institution, the provisions of the principal Act shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, apply to those premises notwithstanding that the work carried on therein is not carried on by way of trade or for the purposes of gain, or that the persons working therein are not working under a contract of service or apprenticeship.

As with the Factories Act, 1955, all laundries attached to charitable and/or reformatory institutions (including Magdalene institutions) should have been subject to the provisions of the governing legislation, e.g., the Factories Inspectorate put in place by the 1907-1920 legislation, and therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the Census of Production carried out by the Saorstát in 1926-1929 should have included pertinent information from the same institutions.

Industrial Schools, because they were subject to inspection by the Department of Education Inspectorate for Special Schools, have typically been considered exempt from the provisions of the Factory and Workshop Acts, and later the Factories Acts. However, if the Returns from the 37 Institutional Laundries in 1926 include information detailing Industrial Schools engaged in commercial laundry work outside of what was necessary with the institutions in question, this position should be reexamined.

The published version of the Census of Production does contain relevant information in terms of wages for industrial works engaged in commercial laundries, which may assist in determining the value of unpaid wages to women who worked in Magdalene and other institutional laundries at the time.