

## RH Notes on Chapters 9, 19 and 20

1. At this stage, we need to focus on the most important issues we have raised. We cannot challenge everything – particularly since many of the conclusions are based on witnesses who we did not introduce and documents we have not seen.
2. But we can challenge findings which are contrary to our evidence – and which are central to the issues before the Dail.

### **Were women free to leave?**

3. In Chapter 9, the Report indicates that many of the women and girls on probation left at the end of their sentence, although it does indicate that one 32 year old woman convicted of stealing in 1936 and given 3 years probation remained at Gloucester Street for 16 years [272]. Others remained even longer – a 21 year old woman who was sent to Sunday's Well in 1936 for 12 months probation “remained there until closure of the Laundry” [269] They will say that this is because the women became auxiliaries and this was a free choice.
4. In Chapter 19, the Report states that the Committee has simply recorded the testimony of the women and not made its own findings [928]. As far as leaving is concerned, it says that women were afraid of having to remain in the Laundry for the rest of their lives, but that this arose out of a misunderstanding – “None of these women were aware of the period of supervision which followed discharge from industrial or reformatory school” [951].
5. The Report also records some women as saying “that they had, from time to time asked to be allowed to leave the Laundry, but were convinced to stay longer” [956]. The Religious Orders then explain that doors were only locked “for security reasons” [961], although there was “in an earlier time, an active encouragement to remain” [961]. However, they let slip that sisters held the keys “to prevent someone running away” [961].



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Were women forced to work?

11. The Report accepts that Wages were not paid either to the girls or women who worked in the Laundries [999].
12. However, I have not yet been able to find any conclusion as to whether women were forced to work.
13. That is doubtless because of our submission – and Geoffrey Shannon’s conclusion – that “the detention and use of women and girls as workers without pay would amount to ‘forced labour’ under the 1930 Forced Labour Convention of the International Labour Organisation, which Ireland signed in 1931” (132-133).
14. It is at this point that it becomes highly relevant whether women were beaten (or subjected to other severe punishment) if they refused to work.
15. The relevant section of the Report starts off with a long list of quotes to the effect that there was no physical abuse in the Laundries [932-936].
16. It is then said that “A small number of women described physical punishment on at least one occasion” [936], but the only example given of physical assault is by *auxiliaries* and not by nuns. The other two examples are of “physical contact” – what are described as a “slap” and a “dig”.
17. What is difficult to understand, *given that the Report is here simply recording the testimony of survivors (and other witnesses)* is why the Report does not record the material we put forward (20-22, 24-27, 29, 47, 129-130, 133). At least four of the survivors we introduced recall serious physical assault ([REDACTED] [REDACTED]). Furthermore, [REDACTED] gives eyewitness evidence of seeing a woman being beaten for refusing to work in Galway and she says women who would not work “got





26. The second point is that they have openly attributed the living costs of the nuns as costs of the Laundry since “to ignore their work contribution would distort the laundry costs” [1007]. Even assuming the nuns did significant work, there is a question mark as to whether this is valid. The nuns were not hired managers. They were there because of a vocation, which one assumes would have existed whether the nuns had decided to operate a laundry or do some other activity. The convents had not “recruited” additional nuns as managers to supervise the women. To offset the cost of the nuns’ food, which they would have required anyway, against the Laundry profits does not appear (to me at least) to be justifiable. That would be akin to me trying to set off the cost of my lunch against the profits of being a barrister – the Revenue would not allow it, as I would have required lunch whether I chose to be a barrister or not.
27. The third point is that the expenses of looking after the women have been deducted. It is true that this is in some ways a “cost” of running the Laundries. But it seems to me to miss the point about forced labour. The women were incarcerated. To deduct for the expense of imprisoning them amounts to a suggestion that the women should be forced to work to pay for their own imprisonment.

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