

*An Cumann  
Staire Lucht  
Saothar  
na hÉireann*



Museum & Archives

Beggars Bush, Haddington Road, Dublin 4, Ireland.

**Irish  
Labour  
History  
Society**

## The Irish Bank Officials' Association



*The first Executive Committee, 1917*

### *Over 90 Years of Progress*

On September 27, 1917 a group of bank workers met in the Glentworth Hotel in Limerick to begin the process that was to lead to the establishment of the Irish Bank Officials' Association on March 17, 1918.

This brave and forward-thinking group were responsible for the establishment of a very effective trade union, which has represented bank staff professionally for over ninety years and has campaigned to improve the working conditions and living standards of workers in the financial services sector. From the outset IBOA has represented financial services staff throughout the island of Ireland.

Since the expansion of two major Irish banks into Great Britain in the 1960s, IBOA has become a trade union operating in three jurisdictions – the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Although much has changed since 1917, the fundamental issues of pay, pensions, stress, bullying and harassment – which motivated the founders of the Union – are still crucial concerns for workers in the financial services sector today.

### *The Early Years*

In 1917, with the employers in banking and finance determined to maximise profits, the average income of the staff working in the industry had gone through a period of decline. Workers were particularly badly paid with no pension provision. The task of the Union's founders was, therefore, a very difficult one. The directors the banks were totally opposed to any form of collective dealing with staff.

The banks operated a policy of fear. Bank directors clearly indicated that they would only deal with staff individually and not through any collective forum. So progress was difficult. Notwithstanding these major hurdles, the then Executive with the assistance of Charles H. Denroche, the IBOA's legal advisor, recruited over 80% of Bank Officials into the IBOA and this was the catalyst that made bank directors change their mind.



*Charles Denroche*

The subsequent appointment of Charles Denroche as the IBOA's Organising Secretary was a masterstroke by the Executive Committee – with his legal and strategic skills. It was decided to ballot for industrial action to force the banks to engage with IBOA.

Determined not to concede recognition of the Union, the bank directors threatened staff that, if they supported the industrial action ballot, they would be “locked-out” and replaced by conscripts from British banks. In spite of this intimidation, IBOA members stood firm – and voting for industrial action by an overwhelming majority.

As a result, the bank directors were forced to yield. A recognition agreement was signed on December 4, 1919. It was also agreed that the issue of salaries and terms and conditions of employment would be referred to arbitration.

The arbitration award represented a major advance for bank officials – providing minimum starting salaries and incremental scales for both male and female staff; and allowances for tellers/cashiers and for accountants/sub-managers. All of these payments were free from income tax. In addition, a similar tax-free payment was paid annually to bank officials in line with increases in the cost of living.

Further improvements achieved under Denroche’s leadership included the introduction of a new pension scheme, regulated disciplinary procedures and holiday entitlements. After the initial dispute over recognition, Denroche’s term as Organising Secretary was a period of industrial peace. Union membership expanded. The Medical Benefit Provident Fund was initiated. Charles Denroche died in 1932.



***John Donovan***

Like his predecessor, IBOA’s next Organising Secretary, John Donovan (*right*), was also a qualified barrister – a necessary attribute since all agreements between the Association and the banks’ directors were legally based. The industrial relations environment also had a strong legal dimension.

Shortly after John Donovan’s appointment, the banks sought to row back on the 1919 agreement on terms and conditions for bank officials. Two issues dominated the early 1930s. The first was the banks’ proposal to introduce a recruitment grade and do away with automatic progression. The second issue was taxation of bank officials’ pay.

The new entry scale was agreed in 1934 – but was the subject of much resentment by new recruits. The taxation

of bank officials’ income, however, was extremely difficult – with the bank resorting to direct attack when IBOA rejected its proposals. All staff were advised on November 23, 1940, that they were required to accept new terms and conditions including the taxation of salaries or else face dismissal.

In a dispute, similar to more recent events, IBOA directed members to advise the banks that the Union was dealing with the matter. However, the banks gave notice of dismissal of staff by December 28, 1940. Eventually, IBOA invoked arbitration which led to a compromise.

However, relations became extremely strained. Between 1943 and 1946 a number of IBOA claims had been rejected in arbitration, culminating in IBOA calling a strike in 1946.

The Irish Government of the day took legal action against three of the Officers of the IBOA on the pretext that the threatened industrial action was unlawful. The Government’s action was dismissed with costs by the Court. Ultimately the dispute was resolved on August 16, 1946. The settlement provided for a salary for men of £100 – progressing by increments to £560 after 21 years’ service and increased by the appropriate cost of living bonus. The entry level salary for women was also £100 – but they were to reach the top of the scale of £240 after 18 years. A Northern Ireland Joint Negotiating Committee was also established under the settlement to provide a forum for discussions on terms and conditions in Northern Ireland. But relationships between management and the Union were now at a new low.

### ***The Post-War Era***

By the time John Titterington became IBOA General Secretary in 1948 after a career in industrial relations in the British banking industry, there was widespread discontent among bank officials over the major concessions they had been forced to make in the preceding years – and equally widespread determination to redress the situation.



***John Titterington***

Within two years, a determined campaign by the Union yielded agreement on a one-hour lunch break; overtime payments; attendance on Sundays and Bank Holidays to be voluntary; and the abolition of the requirement for a bank official to sleep on the premises in the absence of the resident official.



**Executive Committee 1941-42**

*Back (from left): J. M. Somers, J. L. Horner, J. C. McSweeney, E. J. Barrett, J. G. Bobbett, J. H. Daly, C. Boden, F. F. Daly, R. Morrison, F. J. Fitzgerald, F. H. Heaslip, H. Gardiner, N. W. Stafford, D. J. Cogan, C. D. Wilding. Front (from left): R. E. Montgomery, E. W. Logan, C. Brady, P. J. Wymnes (Honorary Treasurer), J. T. Donovan (Organising Secretary), E. A. Dwyer (President), H. V. Batt (Honorary Secretary), J. O. Guthrie, T. C. Hynes, J. C. Ward, T. H. Daly. Inset (from left): B. V. O'Neill, C. W. Rorke, C. W. Mayne.*

However, notwithstanding these improvements, the Union's membership was determined to achieve progress on the core issue of pay. In December 1950, IBOA served notice of all-out industrial action which led to a seven-week strike, lasting until February 1951. The settlement brought increased salaries and rank allowances, and enhanced overtime rates.

Over the next two decades, IBOA secured steady improvements across a wide range of issues, including:

- *Withdrawal of the requirement for staff to seek the bank's permission before marriage to marry;*
- *Introduction of bank uniforms;*
- *Introduction of half-day working on Saturday;*
- *Improved overtime arrangements; and*
- *Introduction of the five-day week in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in 1964.*



**John Titterington leads an IBOA team into the Labour Court**

Two major strikes dominated the post-war era. The 1966 extended strike which introduced the modern structure of salary scales in Irish banking and the very bitter dispute of 1970.

The background to the 1970 dispute had its roots in the Irish Government's Budget of 1968 which resulted in a significant increase in the cost of living during 1969 and 1970. While other employees – including craft and construction workers – secured pay increases of 20%, the banks refused to concede similar increases for their officials.



**John Nelson**

When IBOA introduced a work-to-rule in protest in February 1970, the banks responded by cutting staff salaries by 25% and employing temporary staff. When problems began to emerge in the clearing departments, all staff were suspended in these areas with the result that the banks closed down on April 30 and did not re-open until November 17, 1970. While the settlement terms mirrored other negotiated settlements of the time, the shutdown of the banking sector for over six months had a profound impact.

When John Titterington retired the following year, he

was succeeded by John Nelson as the Union's General Secretary. During his brief period in office, he conducted negotiations on the "Package Deal" for Bank Officials which included entitlements to death grants and to benefits for widows and orphans. He also led negotiations on a number of other issues such as week-end attendance; computerisation; overseas allowances; stress in the workplace and security. After Nelson's sudden departure in March 1973, Titterington returned briefly to centre stage on a caretaker basis until a permanent appointment to the position of General Secretary could be made in October 1973.

### *The Modern Era*



*Job Stott*

In October 1973, the Executive Committee finally filled the vacancy for the position of General Secretary with the appointment of the highly experienced Job Stott – who up to that point had served in a similar capacity with the ESB Officers' Association. The mid 1970s saw further progress on the implementation of equal pay in the banking sector, the introduction of the seven-hour working day, pension parity, frequent transfer and compensation payments.

However, another major dispute began in 1976 when the Government intervened to block a major productivity deal negotiated between the banks and IBOA on the grounds that it exceeded the terms of the National Wage Agreement – even though IBOA was not a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions at that time and was, therefore, not a party to the agreement. The Minister for Labour became directly involved to prevent bank staff benefitting from the deal. After three months of industrial action, the Union's members reluctantly accepted the terms of the National Wage Agreement. However, the productivity concessions were also withdrawn as a consequence. So for the sake of maintaining the appearance of uniformity in the Government's wages policy, both the bank workers and the banks lost out.

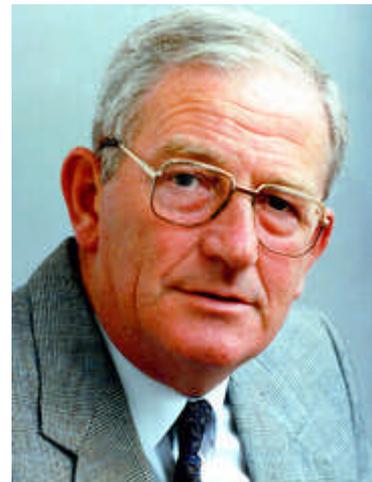
With the steady advance of information and communications technology, IBOA negotiated a landmark agreement on Technology and Change in the 1982-83. The Union secured increased salaries, improved rank and re-grading, enhanced annual leave, optional early retirement

and an improved transferability agreement.

However, as the decade wore on, management became increasingly hostile – developing a new 'American-style' campaign to break the Union. The first indication of this new approach was a bitter dispute in 1987 in Bank of Ireland and AIB over the Technology and Change Agreement – which required industrial action to reach a settlement.

This new management style was part of a new culture in banking which included individual contracts for managers, the growth of performance-related pay, increasing promotional opportunities and the appointment of outsiders to key positions in banks.

At the same time, as the two major Irish banks expanded into Great Britain, IBOA began to organise the British-based staff of AIB and Bank of Ireland.



*Ciaran Ryan*

Following Job Stott's retirement in 1989, the Union's Executive Committee appointed Ciaran Ryan as General Secretary. This was a shrewd move. Ryan's career had taken a couple of twists firstly as a trade union official with the Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks (now MANDATE), then as a personnel officer before becoming Divisional Director of the employers' confederation, IBEC.

His appointment came at a time of growing unrest among workers in the financial services sector as managements focussed increasingly on cutting costs. IBOA was increasingly seen as an obstacle to this new agenda – with the result that undermining the Union became an end in itself for managements across the sector.

Matters came to a head in January 1992, when the retail banks awarded managers increases in excess of the terms of the National Wage Agreement – but limited pay increases to non-managerial staff to the national norm. When IBOA commenced limited industrial action in pursuit of pay equity, the response of the banks was to cut salaries even further – or, in the case of AIB to suspend staff with immediate effect.

So began one of the most bitter disputes in the history of the Union. With the majority of bank officials supporting IBOA, the employers attempted to keep the banks open by using non-members, staff who were prepared to pass the official picket and their family members.

When the dispute was eventually resolved in April 1992, IBOA had survived the banks' attempt to break the Union – but not without substantial damage. With around 4,000 members expelled (including most of the managerial grades), major work was necessary to re-build the Union in the face of the more aggressive posture adopted by management.

One of the more positive outcomes of the dispute was the Union's successful legal action against the four main Banks for their decision to cut pay and impose suspensions on staff without due process in the form of the agreed disciplinary procedures. In a number of test cases brought by individual members who had been penalised in this way, the Court endorsed the Union's view that the banks' actions had contravened the principle of natural justice. These cases established an important historic precedent in terms of disciplinary procedures not just for bank staff but for all other employees in the Irish Republic.

A further direct consequence of the dispute was the decision by IBOA's Executive Committee to seek to affiliate to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). ICTU had been of considerable practical assistance to IBOA during the course of the dispute. The IBOA Executive Committee also recognised that in the new era of social partnership that was emerging, Congress would be in a position to influence public policy in a number of areas of economic and social development as well as core issues such as pay and the industrial relations framework.

Since IBOA formally affiliated to ICTU in July 1993, the Union has played an active and positive role in the organisation. IBOA has been represented on the Congress Executive and has figured prominently in ICTU's key debates and campaigns in recent years.

For the remainder of the 1990s IBOA was engaged in patiently rebuilding its membership base, expanding services for members and re-establishing itself as a major force within the financial services sector. In addition to its traditional heartland in the banking industry, IBOA began to develop membership in a number of other companies operating in finance.

In some cases, the trigger for this development was the outsourcing of work from banks to service providers (which may have involved a transfer of staff). IBOA's approach was to follow the work and, where possible, organise the workers involved. These employments have included EDS, HP, GE Money, International Currency Exchange, Carillion and other related areas.



**Larry Broderick**

Following Ciaran Ryan's retirement in 2001, the Executive Committee decided to promote Larry Broderick to the position of General Secretary. Larry had served as the Union's Assistant General Secretary since 1984 - having previously worked as an industrial relations official with the ITGWU (now SIPTU).

The Union has continued to grow in recent years on the back of a number of important advances for its members. At the same time, this additional leverage has enabled the Union to ensure further benefits for membership whenever opportunities arise. Membership has increased to almost 22,000 and progress has been made in enhancing members' terms and conditions.

The overall message from this historical review is that IBOA is only as strong as its members. When members stick together, significant improvements can be made.

IBOA - The Finance Union is proud of its history. But members have a responsibility to honour that legacy by participating in and supporting their Union as it seeks to protect their jobs, terms and conditions.



IBOA - The Finance Union looks towards the next ninety years but remains true to its roots:

**Our Cause is Just – Stand Firm**

*(quotation from 1946 Strike circulars)*