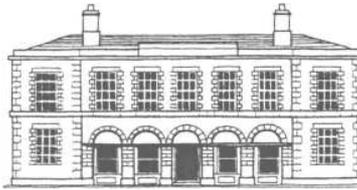


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## NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has had a presence in Ireland since 1909 three years after the formation of the union in Manchester. But it has had continuous organisation only since World War 2. The union's rapid growth in the past two decades had underlined the extent to which it has been fighting to keep up with the expansion of the media in all their facets.

Following the political upheavals of the 1910s and early 1920s, C.J. Bundock, the union's national organiser had to visit Dublin in 1926 to revive the branch there. There were soon 80 members in Dublin, mainly in the national newspapers. A new Belfast branch recruited 17 members. But it was difficult to retain the fragmented membership; at one stage total membership in Northern Ireland was down to two. The NUJ's efforts were affected by the presence of the Institute of Journalist (IOJ), also British based. It had been formed as a professional body before the NUJ and took on a limited trade union role too. The IOJ operated in Ireland from 1890 to the 1960s and has been revived - though on a very small base - in recent years. The formation of the Guild of Irish Journalists in 1949, as a nationalist breakaway, affiliated to the ICIU and subsequently, alongside the NUJ, to the ICTU, further complicated the scene for some time.

The first strong base of the NUJ was in the then new Irish Press in the 1930s. The night editor of the paper was also secretary of the Dublin branch and most of the editorial staff were members of the union. The growth in Irish membership won it direct representation on the London-based executive and the establishment of an all-Ireland District Council. The Dublin branch affiliated to the DTC in 1932 and later joined the Dublin Printing Trades Group. In 1934, the branch supported a strike by newspaper transport workers and, as a result, secured formal recognition from the newspaper managements and was taken into the conciliation machinery for handling grievances in the industry. The first provincial branch of the union was established in the late 1930s in Limerick. But at one stage a group of reporters in Munster, who considered the dues of both the NUJ and the IOJ to be too high, set about forming an Irish Journalists Association. They could not muster the £500 required to register as a trade union.

The new form of registration laid down in the 1941 Trade Union Act provoked a major crisis in the NUJ. The executive in London considered that the union could not continue to operate in Ireland. The NUJ condemned the IOJ for registering and offered to help Irish members to

set up their own organisation. But the Dublin Branch and particularly its secretary, R.M. Fox, protested at being abandoned. Fox's argument for registration under protest at the 'fascist' legislation won the day by 11 votes to 10 in an executive vote in August 1942.

NUJ organisation in the Dublin newspapers went through cycles of decline and revival. It was not until 1947, on the strength of one of those re-organisational efforts, that Dublin journalists secured their first agreement on an eight-hour day and minimum rates of pay. Previously, it had not been uncommon for journalists to work 12 and 14 hours; their lives revolved around their work and they stayed on at an editor's request to ensure a job was completed. The union expanded its Irish membership outside the two main cities in the years after the war, though the IOJ continued to represent *Cork Examiner* journalists, and reorganisation in the largely family-owned provincial papers was patchy. Provincial branches were organised as sub-branches of the Dublin branch; not having autonomous status until the 1960s. At distances of 100 miles and more from their branch meeting places the provincial members felt remote.

The NUJ had no recognition and few members in Radio Eireann as long as it operated directly under the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. With the passing of the Broadcasting Act in 1960 and the establishment of RTE, as a semi-state body, the union secured organisation rights in the news and sports divisions.

The Irish membership was serviced in formal negotiations on agreements with the Provincial Newspapers Association of Ireland, the Dublin Newspapers Management, Committee and RTE by London-based officials. The Irish membership was represented on the executive by a single representative. An area council, with delegates from branches in Northern Ireland and the Republic, had responsibility for some local matters. Following an annual conference decision in 1964, the first full-time official to service Irish membership was appointed in 1965 - Jim Eadie. The appointment was made just as a 12-week strike by Dublin printers was coming to an end. Journalists in national newspapers had been laid off as a result of the dispute and the NUJ was party to the printers' deliberations through its membership of the Dublin Printing Trades Group.

The union made a symbolic move in 1965 from its then Irish headquarters, in a dingy upstairs room in Westmore-

land Street, Dublin, to an office in the newly completed Liberty Hall. The union's growth in Ireland since the 1960s has been more rapid and more consistent than in any other area within the NUJ. Membership more than doubled from 100 in the mid 1960s to 1,800 in the mid 1970s. It has grown by a further 60% to just over 3,000 in the past decade.

Over the same period, conditions have improved dramatically, so much so that the Dublin members passed from being poor cousins to being, for a time, the best paid members of the NUJ. Throughout the 1970s the union opposed the National Wage Agreements within the ICTU - it negotiated local ('house') agreements from 1974 onwards which gave much bigger pay increases and improvements in conditions. Stronger chapel (workplace) organisation helped secure these gains. The union's strongest units are the national newspaper chapels which, with the withering away of both the IOJ and the Guild of Irish Journalists, became NUJ closed shops. The union also secured closed shops in RTE and in most provincial papers, where the house agreements were negotiated through the 1970s. Despite the rapid growth in the magazine sector, the NUJ was less well able to secure similar gains there.

From the mid 1970s, Irish members enjoyed an unprecedented high profile in the upper echelons and since 1974 there have been a number of Irish-based presidents. The reorganisation of the union's internal structures had the by-product of increasing the autonomy of the Irish organisation but also dividing it on north/south lines. Industrial councils were established in 1976 at a level below the executive to represent the union sectors - national newspapers, freelance, magazines etc. For this purpose, the Republic of Ireland was treated as a sector, the council being elected on a sectoral basis within the 26 counties.

Opposition to censorship and the demand for access to information have been the basis for a widening of the union's agenda beyond its own internal or purely industrial concerns. In that context, it consistently and publicly opposed section 31 of the Broadcasting Act under which orders were made prohibiting RTE from carrying interviews with members of certain named organisations. These orders were repealed in 1994.

The NUJ has not been particularly prominent in the wider trade union movement, though its members have served as officers of a number of trades' councils. The NUJ was affiliated to the ITUC from the early 1940s and to the ICTU from 1959. Jim Eadie served as a member of the ICTU's executive council in the early 1980s and from 1993.