

Pioneer Postcards

To mark International Women's Day (March 8) in 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and SIPTU, produced a pack of postcards depicting some of the women 'pioneers' of the labour and trade union movement. It is intended as the first in a series which honours the contribution made by working women, North and South; and starts with women who have, for example, held officerships in Congress and/or their own unions during the 20th century.

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LOUIE BENNETT, 1869-1956, HELEN CHENEVIX, 1890-1963

Began their long association with the Irish Women Workers' Union in 1916. Louie Bennett served the union for 38 years, as General Secretary, as Irish Trade Union Congress executive committee member, 1927-31 and 1944-50; and was the first woman President of the ITUC in 1932 and again in 1948. Helen Chenevix was IWWU General Secretary (1955-57); on the Congress Executive (1949-56); and Congress President in 1951.

CISSY CAHALAN, 1876-1948

Was a member of the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association, now MANDATE. She worked in Arnotts, Dublin in 1912 she formed a Women's Committee in the Dublin branch. She was President of her union in 1921, and was elected to the Irish Trade Union Congress executive, 1922-23.



MAI CLIFFORD

A veteran of the 1945 laundry workers' strike, was elected to the Irish Women Workers' Union Executive in 1956. She was elected as the first woman President of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, 1978-81; and led the large PAYE tax protest marches in Dublin, during that time

SHEILA CONROY

A hotel worker, ITGWU member from 1942, the first woman to be elected to the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union's National Executive Council, 1955-59, topping the poll in 1958. In 1959 she resigned because of the marriage bar. In 1969 she became Secretary of the People's College; served on the Commission for the Status of Women in 1972; and the RTE Authority from 1973-79.



KAY FALLON (GERAGHTY)

Member of the Workers' Union of Ireland proposed the establishment of the first National Committee for trade union women at the 1959 founding conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. **BETTY SINCLAIR**, who was Secretary of the Belfast and District Trades Union Council, 1947-75, seconded her motion. The Women's Advisory Committee was renamed the Women's Committee in 1983. Betty Sinclair died in 1981 and Kay Fallon in 2001.



MARY GALWAY, 1864-1928

A pioneer woman trade unionist and champion of Ireland's linen workers, was born in Moira, Co. Down. She was Secretary of the Textile Operatives' Society of Ireland, 1897-1928; the first woman on the Irish Trade Union Congress national executive, from 1907; and became its first woman Vice-President, in 1910.



DELIA LARKIN, 1879-1949

Was the founding secretary of the Irish Women Workers' Union, 1911-15. She wrote a weekly column in the Irish Worker, and represented her union at the Irish Trade Union Congress from 1912 to 1914. She organised the huge relief effort in Liberty Hall during the 1913 Lockout.

CATHERINE MAHON, 1869-1948

The first woman President of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, elected in 1912 and again in 1913. She championed equal pay and women's representation throughout the union; and was elected to the Central Executive Committee in 1907. ROSE TIMMON, also from the INTO, was the second woman elected to the Irish Trade Union Congress executive, serving from 1918-21.



INEZ McCORMACK

The first woman President, 2000-2002, of the ICTU since its formation in 1959. The first woman full-time official of the National Union of Public Employees, 1976-90; the first woman Regional Secretary of UNISON in 1993; the first woman elected to the Northern Ireland Committee of Congress, 1980; its first woman Chair, 1984-85. In July 2007, PATRICIA McKEOWN, also UNISON, becomes the second woman President. She was joint Vice President (2005-2007) with SIPTU's National Equality Secretary, ROSHEEN CALLENDER, the first women from the south to hold this position.



PADRAIGÍN NÍ MHURCHÚ

The last serving General Secretary of the Irish Women Workers' Union, 1982-84, before its amalgamation with FWUI. She then became the first woman member of the Labour Court. (Its first woman Chairperson was EVELYN OWENS of the LGPSU.) Padraigín had been a FWUI official from 1973-81, and IWWU Assistant General Secretary, 1981-82. Her predecessor as IWWU General Secretary was MAURA BRESLIN (1970-1982), who was President of the IWWU in 1956 and served on the Executive Council of Congress, 1971-74. The first woman to be elected onto the Executive Council of the new ICTU, in 1959, was KAY McDOWELL of the IWWU; Kay was General Secretary of the IWWU, 1957-70.



HELENA MOLONY, 1883-1967

Was appointed organiser of the Irish Women Workers' Union by James Connolly in 1915. She was a member of the Irish Citizen's Army in the 1916 Easter Rising. She was an IWWU official; on the Dublin Trades Council until 1939, and an Irish Trade Union Congress executive member in 1921 and 1933-37, becoming its second woman President in 1937.



PATRICIA O'DONOVAN

The first woman to be appointed as Deputy General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 1997-2000. She worked in Congress from 1977, serving as Legislation Officer, Equality Officer and Assistant General Secretary. In 2001, she took up a senior position in the International Labour Organisation, as Director of Social Dialogue, Labour Law and Labour Administration; and is now an ILO Executive Director. Patricia's successors as Assistant General Secretary were JOAN CARMICHAEL (2001-2004), who then became a Rights Commissioner, in mid-2004; and the current AGS SALLY-ANNE KINAHAN.



BETTY SINCLAIR, was Secretary of the Belfast and District Trades Union Council, 1947-75. She seconded a motion by **KAY FALLON (GERAGHTY)** of the Workers' Union of Ireland proposing the establishment of the first National Committee for trade union women at the 1959 founding conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The Women's Advisory Committee was renamed the Women's Committee in 1983. Betty Sinclair died in 1981 and Kay Fallon in 2001.

The packs are available from

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