Evelyn Owens

An Appreciation

By Sheila Simmons and Francis Devine

IMPACT

IMPACT

"I first started work with Dublin Corporation in 1979 in what was then Capel Buildings, better known to Dubliners as Baxendales. It was there that I first met Evelyn Owens who worked as an administrative officer in the finance offices and treasurer's department.

For me, it was an opportunity to meet one of my biggest personal influences. Evelyn provided a great inspiration to anyone around her who shared her commitment to social justice. She also brought common sense to problem solving. Through her stewardship of the Dublin Corporation branch, longstanding and divisive issues such as a national integrated common recruitment pool were resolved.

Evelyn enjoyed her tea-time conversations with a group of very senior managers in the Corporation, and once remarked to me that she wondered whether her union work, gender or political involvement had been an obstacle to her gaining further promotion with Dublin Corporation. Or, she sardonically asked, was it on account of her lack of ability? Evelyn's later appointment to the Labour Court answered that question.

I was privileged to move a motion to commemorate Evelyn at IMPACT's 2011 Local Government, Education and Local Services divisional conference in Castlebar. The motion brought Evelyn's achievements to life for a new generation of trade union activists."

Peter Nolan
National Secretary of IMPACT's Local Government, Education and Local Services Division.

Annual Report **2010** | An Chúirt Oibreachais The Labour Court

Labour Court annual report 2010

"It is with great regret that I must record the passing, in September 2010, of Evelyn who served as Chairman of the Court from 1994 to 1998.

Throughout her career she was committed to the advancement of women in the workplace and in society. As Chairman and as Deputy Chairman Evelyn showed great skill in the resolution of many difficult industrial relations disputes. She will be remembered, in particular, for her careful and incisive interpretation and application of employment equality legislation which resulted in many seminal decisions of the Court in matters of equal pay and equal treatment of men and women.

As Chairman her qualities of leadership and independence greatly advanced the reputation and standing of the Court as a respected institution providing fair and impartial adjudication in industrial relations and employment rights disputes."

Kevin Duffy, Chairman
September 2011

Introduction

As a Senator in 1972, Evelyn Owens moved a motion noting the Interim Report on Equal Pay by the Commission on the Status of Women and urging the Government to introduce legislation forthwith to implement the recommendations. In her speech, Evelyn drew the attention of the House to the word "forthwith". She said it was not "as soon as possible". She concluded that, if the motion was adopted, the Government would immediately proceed to draft legislation and bring it before the next session of the Dáil and Seanad.[1]

Any trade unionist or manager who attended a Labour Court Hearing chaired by Evelyn faced this precision of language. There was no room for generalities or sweeping statements. If you wanted to convince Evelyn of your case you needed to be specific and precise. She was a formidable person, a great trade unionist, an honoured politician and an esteemed public servant.

The topic debated in the Seanad in 1972 was at the heart of everything that Evelyn worked for. This booklet captures the story of Evelyn's commitment to and struggles for equal pay for women. She had to overcome obstacles in the public service, in the political world and in her own union. She prevailed and succeeded through collective activity in achieving her goals.

She is a true role model for us all.

I would like to thank Sheila Simmons and Francis Devine for this excellent appreciation, and Martina O'Leary for organising the layout and production of this booklet, which IMPACT is proud to publish in Evelyn's honour.

Shay Cody
General Secretary
IMPACT

Beginnings

Evelyn Owens was born on 22nd January, 1931, at 23 Vernon Gardens, Clontarf, Dublin. She was the fourth of six children born to William, a civil servant, and Ellen (née Monaghan). After a brief residence in Limerick, the family returned to Stiles Road, Clontarf in 1938 and she spent the rest of her life there. She was educated at Holy Faith convent, where she was reported as "gaining superior results in the public examinations". She successfully sat the Dublin Corporation entrance examinations in 1948 and started work as a clerical officer in the City Treasurer's department. Despite "some fuss about getting permission" from her parish priest, she later attained a diploma in public administration at Trinity College, Dublin.[2]

Imbued with a deep sense of social justice, Evelyn joined the Irish Local Government Officials' Union (ILGOU), early on in her career in Dublin Corporation. She served on her branch and eventually on the National Executive Committee.[3]

A committed union activist, she became its first woman President from 1967. She was appointed as a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Public Services Committee and Women's Advisory Committee, serving as chair from1968-1971.

Her contribution to both was significant. She gave evidence to the Commission on the Status of Women and was a member of the Council for the Status of Women (CSW) from its formation in 1973. The CSW became the National Women's Council of Ireland in 1995.[4] In all these positions, Evelyn championed the position of women, forcing the debate inside the trade unions to look well beyond the workplace to the roots of gender discrimination in broader society.

Equal pay

Evelyn's early involvement in her union involved conflict with the union leadership. In 1963, the ILGOU got an award through Conciliation and Arbitration that had long been fought for. The union objected to gender pay differentials but the Department of Local Government were concerned that the maintenance of equal scales would create parity claims from women across the public and semi-state sectors. The local government service then provided, ab initio, equal

IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' UNION.

HEAD OFFICES: 29, Lower Ormond Quay,
DUBLIN, 1.

'Phone 48473-4.

M E M O R A N D U M. 14th October, 1963.

TO/ Each Member of the National Executive Committee,
" Branch Honorary Secretary, and
" Clerical Officer Member of the Union.

Dear Sir or Madam,

ARBITRATION BOARD - CLERICAL OFFICERS' SALARY CLAIM.

I am directed by the Officer Board to send you herewith a copy of the FINDINGS in the above case. As you can see the Arbitration Board failed to reach agreement and the Award made has been made by the Chairman, pursuant to Clause 44 (3) of the Conciliation/Arbitration Scheme.

The Officer Board has very carefully considered this Award in all its various aspects, and especially the implications involved in deciding whether to accept or reject it. The Award is disappointing, particularly in the matter of the differentiated scale offered to our female members, introducing as it does a principle of pay which is foreign to the Local Service. At the hearings the Management side brought forward evidence to show that in outside employments women are paid substantially less than their male colleagues, instancing such employments as the Banks, Air Lingus, Bord na Mona, Teachers, etc., and offered as a compromise a differentiated scale based on marriage,(i.e. £60 on marriage and a further £60 a year later.). This offer if accepted would not have given any increase to either single men or to women, and would also admit a principle of pay equally foreign to the Service.

The Staff Side Advocates presented a well-documented case (copy of which is available for reading on application to your Branch Secretary) and on the issues of the differentiated scales emphasised the absence of these scales hitherto, and the unfairness of introducing them at this stage to the prejudice of existing officers. They pointed out that the principle of equal pay for equal work is an essential part of the Treaty of Rome, which is the instrument governing the Common Market, and that this principle has already been accepted in the British Civil Service. They were hampered, however, by the fact that Ireland has failed to subscribe to the International Labour Office convention of equal pay for equal work, and that in practice over practically the whole range of clerical employment in this country - and in other employments as well - equal pay for women for equal work is not applied.

The following table sets out the proposed new scales comparative with the existing scale and the amount of the increase payable at each year of service:-

Year:	Present Scale:	Arbitrator's Award: Male	Increase:	Female	Increase:
1	£350	£350		£350	
2	375	380	£5	380	£5
3	400	410	10	410	10
4	425	440	15	440	15
5	450	470	20	470	20
6	475	500	25	500	25
7	500	550	50	530	30
8	525	585	60	560	35
9	550	620	70	550	40
10	580	655	75	620	40
11	610	690	80	650	40
12	640	725	85	680	40
13	670	760	90	710	40
14	700	795	95	740	40
15	730	830	100	770	40
16	760	865	105	800	40
17	790	900	110	830	40
18	820	935	105	860	40
19	850	970	120	860	10
20		1005	155	860	10
21				860	10
22				860	10
23				900	50

retrospective to 1st April, 1963.

The arbitration board recommended the introduction of gender pay differentials for clerical officers in local government in 1963.

pay for women, one of only three bodies to do so. The others were the National Orchestra and Dáil Reporters.[5]

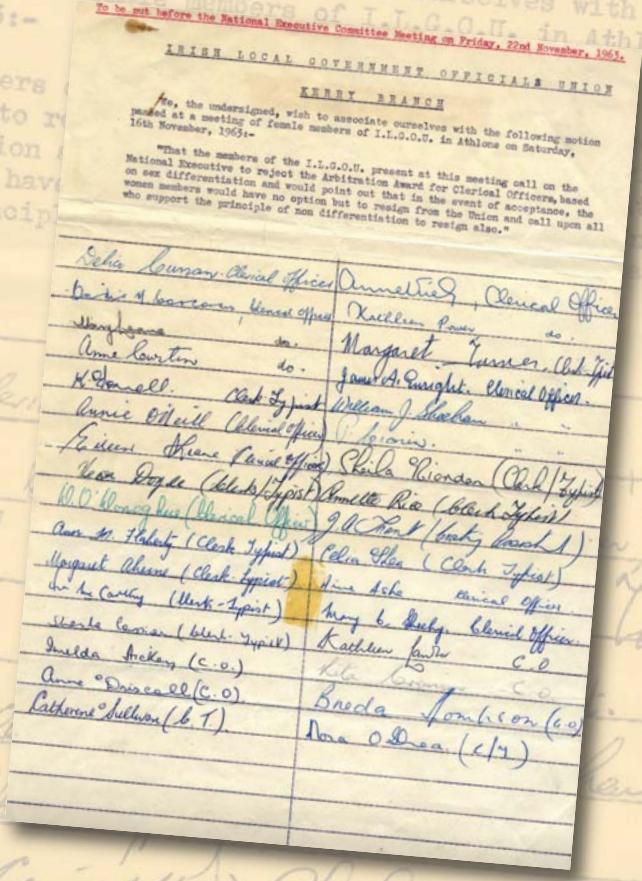
Evelyn was fully cognisant of what the introduction of gender-differentiated scales would mean. While she was "one of the few women at that time aware and concerned at the preconceived notion of women exclusively as wives and child-bearers with no right to independent status" this was incidental to her wider commitment to principles of social justice for all.[6]

An arbitrator, Richard McGonigal SC, had been appointed to hear the union's claim. After lengthy argument, McGonigal recommended scales based on differentials between men and women. The men's scale ranged from £350 to £1,005 with further increments for marriage. Women were offered between £350 to £860. There was to be a long service award of £40 after five years on the maximum. The Marriage Bar, which obliged women to resign on marriage, ensured that few women would ever benefit from this and, in any case, the scales offered were an attempt to introduce a discriminated scale into the local authorities. McGonigal's finding "led to a complete breakdown in trust in the ILGOU".[7]

Internal conflict

The union Executive felt that, having tried to gain an arbitration scheme for years, the award should be accepted and implemented. Other claims long in the pipeline could then be moved along. Although they felt the award was 'disappointing', the union officers recommended acceptance to the Executive on 25 October, 1963. Evelyn was a key player at a meeting of Dublin Corporation members on 16th October, when a vote was taken to oppose the award and seek counsel's advice as to the legality of paying differential scales to existing officers.

Some women members campaigned both against the award and against the Executive accepting it. The key women were Evelyn, Marian Burleigh, Teresa Geoghehan, Dorothy Richmond, Kathleen Ryder, Sheila Simmons and Executive member Katherine McCarron.[8] They met in the Workers' Union of Ireland premises or at McCarron's home.



To be put before the National Executive Committee Meeting on Friday, 22nd November, 1963.

IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS UNION

KERRY BRANCH

We, the undersigned, wish to associate ourselves with the following motion passed at a meeting of female members of I.L.G.O.U. in Athlone on Saturday, 16th November, 1963:-

"That the members of the I.L.G.O.U. present at this meeting call on the National Executive to reject the Arbitration Award for Clerical Officers, based on sex differentiation and would point out that in the event of acceptance, the women members would have no option but to resign from the Union and call upon all who support the principle of non differentiation to resign also."

Delia Cussan. Clerical Officer	Annette Rice, Clerical Officer
Bridie M. Corcoran, Clerical Officer	Kathleen Power do.
Mary Lyons do.	Margaret Turner. Clerk-Typist
Anne Curtin do.	James A. Enright. Clerical Officer.
K. Donnell. Clerk-Typist	William J. Sheehan " "
Annie O'Neill (Clerical Officer)	P. Lorin. " "
Eileen Shane (Clerical Officer)	Sheila Riordan (Clerk/Typist)
Vera Doyle (Clerk/Typist)	Annette Rice (Clerk Typist)
W. O'Donoghue (Clerical Officer)	J. A. Trant (Cashier Assistant)
Ann M. Flaherty (Clerk Typist)	Celia Shea (Clerk Typist)
Margaret Aherne (Clerk-Typist)	Anne Ashe Clerical Officer
Ina McCarthy (Clerk-Typist)	Mary C. Sheehy. Clerical Officer.
Sheila Cassian (Clerk-Typist)	Kathleen Lawlor C.O.
Imelda Hickey (C.O.)	Rita Cronin C.O.
Anne O'Driscoll (C.O.)	Breda Tomlison (C.O.)
Catherine O'Sullivan (C.T.)	Dora O'Drea. (C/T)

Evelyn's early involvement in her union involved conflict with the union leadership. In 1963 the conciliation and arbitration scheme, which had been fought hard for, sought to introduce wage differentials between men and women in local government. The ILGOU officers, albeit reluctantly, recommended acceptance to the Executive on 25 October, 1963. Evelyn Owens and a group of key women fought against the union executive decision.

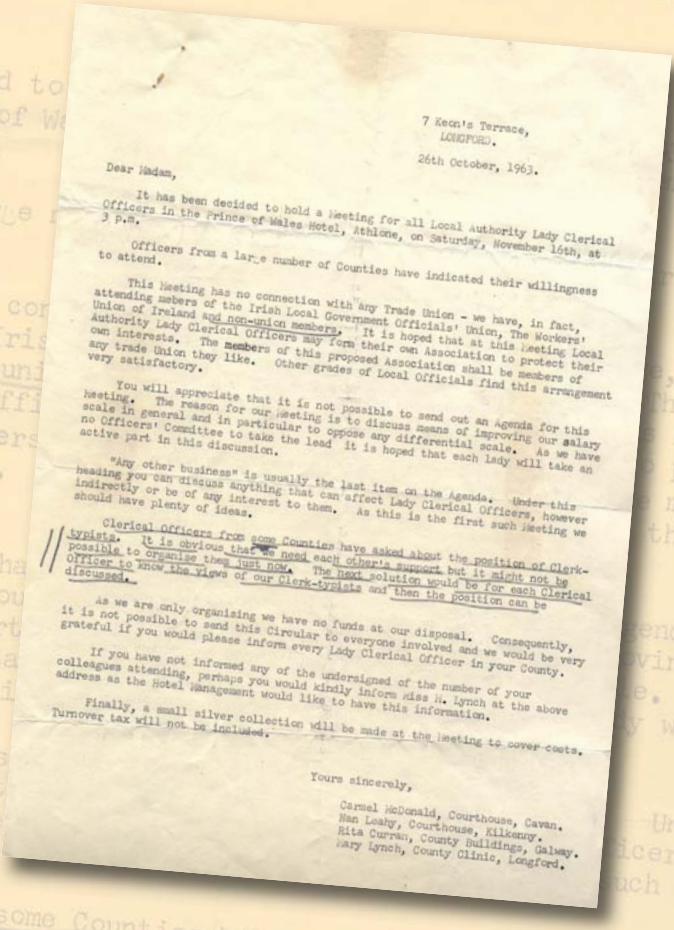
At a Dublin Corporation SGM on 23rd October, Evelyn moved that Executive acceptance of the scales would breach union policy on equality determined by Conference on motions she had moved. The Executive were asked to seek sanction from the Dublin City Manager's office for national pay scales for clerical officers. Eventually, the Executive agreed to accept the award but 'at the earliest opportunity' to 'seek the restoration of an undifferentiated scale'. A ballot took place on 19th November and the award was accepted by a majority, 1,576-971. Evelyn and the other women felt let down.

A few days later, on 23rd November, a group of 94 women met in the Engineers' Hall.[9] Without the knowledge of union President Harold O'Sullivan, notice was circulated on union-headed paper. O'Sullivan had led the negotiations and became General Secretary in May 1964.[10] He turned up at the meeting but was voted out of the Chair and replaced by Evelyn. The women threatened to resign from the union if the differential scales were accepted and called a national meeting of women members in Athlone.[11]

The Association of Women Officers

Not all who attended in Athlone were union members, although all were local government officers. They formed the Association of Women Officers of the Local Authorities of Ireland (AWOLAI).[12] Evelyn was Chair of the association. Funds were collected for legal action and on 22nd November an injunction was served on the ILGOU Executive to prevent them accepting the award. The AWOLAI legal action was taken in the name of Eithne Kane, a volunteer in the Dublin Health Authority.[13]

TDs Noel Browne, Liam Cosgrave, Michael D. Higgins and Dan Spring raised matters in the Dáil. The AWOLAI 'were far more successful at organising the women officers of the local government service than the ILGOU had been'. By December it had 146 members, a national network of officers and continued support from those angered by the ILGOU Executive's stand. Mary Lynch in Longford proved a dynamic organiser. An impasse arose with the Executive who were fearful of court action while management was afraid to take any initiative. Dublin City Manager, T.C. O'Mahony, openly noted the disunity within the ILGOU and called for a meeting with their Executive and the women, who were represented by Sheila Simmons.



7 Keon's Terrace,
LONGFORD.

26th October, 1963.

Dear Madam,

It has been decided to hold a Meeting for all Local Authority Lady Clerical Officers in the Prince of Wales Hotel, Athlone, on Saturday, November 16th, at 3 p.m.

Officers from a large number of Counties have indicated their willingness to attend.

This Meeting has no connection with any Trade Union - we have, in fact, attending members of the Irish Local Government Officials' Union, The Workers' Union of Ireland and non-union members. It is hoped that at this Meeting Local Authority Lady Clerical Officers may form their own Association to protect their own interests. The members of this proposed Association shall be members of any trade Union they like. Other grades of Local Officials find this arrangement very satisfactory.

You will appreciate that it is not possible to send out an Agenda for this Meeting. The reason for our meeting is to discuss means of improving our salary scale in general and in particular to oppose any differential scale. As we have no Officers' Committee to take the lead it is hoped that each Lady will take an active part in this discussion.

"Any other business" is usually the last item on the Agenda. Under this heading you can discuss anything that can affect Lady Clerical Officers, however indirectly or be of any interest to them. As this is the first such Meeting we should have plenty of ideas.

Clerical Officers from some Counties have asked about the position of Clerk-typists. It is obvious that we need each other's support but it might not be possible to organise them just now. The next solution would be for each Clerical Officer to know the views of our Clerk-typists and then the position can be discussed.

As we are only organising we have no funds at our disposal. Consequently, it is not possible to send this Circular to everyone involved and we would be very grateful if you would please inform every Lady Clerical Officer in your County.

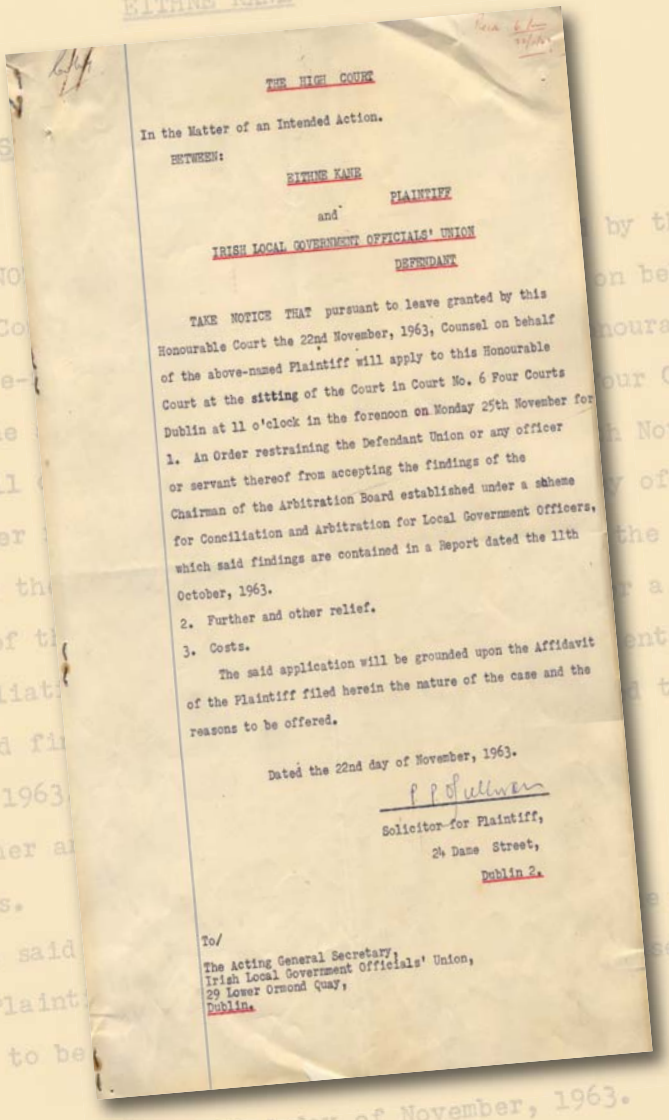
If you have not informed any of the undersigned of the number of your colleagues attending, perhaps you would kindly inform Miss M. Lynch at the above address as the Hotel Management would like to have this information.

Finally, a small silver collection will be made at the Meeting to cover costs. Turnover tax will not be included.

Yours sincerely,

Carmel McDonald, Courthouse, Cavan.
Nan Leahy, Courthouse, Kilkenny.
Rita Curran, County Buildings, Galway.
Mary Lynch, County Clinic, Longford.

A national meeting of women members met in Athlone to protest at the ILGOU's response to the arbitrator's recommendation to introduce wage differentials. The Association of Women Officers of the Local Authorities was formed with Evelyn as its chairperson.



THE HIGH COURT

In the Matter of an Intended Action.

BETWEEN:

EITHNE KANE

PLAINTIFF

and

IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' UNION

DEFENDANT

TAKE NOTICE THAT pursuant to leave granted by this Honourable Court the 22nd November, 1963, Counsel on behalf of the above-named Plaintiff will apply to this Honourable Court at the sitting of the Court in Court No. 6 Four Courts Dublin at 11 o'clock in the forenoon on Monday 25th November for

1. An Order restraining the Defendant Union or any officer or servant thereof from accepting the findings of the Chairman of the Arbitration Board established under a scheme for Conciliation and Arbitration for Local Government Officers, which said findings are contained in a Report dated the 11th October, 1963.

2. Further and other relief.

3. Costs.

The said application will be grounded upon the Affidavit of the Plaintiff filed herein the nature of the case and the reasons to be offered.

Dated the 22nd day of November, 1963.

P P O'Sullivan

Solicitor for Plaintiff,
24 Dame Street,
Dublin 2.

To/
The Acting General Secretary,
Irish Local Government Officials' Union,
29 Lower Ormond Quay,
Dublin.

An injunction, taken out by the newly formed Association of Women Officers of the Local Authorities of Ireland (AWOLA), of which Evelyn Owens was chairperson, was served on the ILGOU on 22nd November 1963 to prevent them accepting the arbitration award that introduced wage differentials.

Message from the President

I.L.G.O.U. FORUM

Official Journal of the Irish Local Government Officials' Union

Vol. 1 - No. 1
SPRING 1969

Editor
PHIL FLYNN

Editorial Offices
29 LOWER ORMOND QUAY
DUBLIN 1
(Telephone 48493)

Advertising enquiries to the Publishers:

© Copyright

UNIVERSAL PUBLISHING CO.
69 Middle Abbey Street
Dublin 1
(Telephones 44903/49769)

Message from the President

Evelyn P. Owens

Dear Member,

With this, the first issue of the new Union journal, may I appeal to you to support this venture, not merely by reading the journal but also by contributing material for publication. Its success or failure will depend on the members. It is hoped that you will use the journal as a 'forum' for expressing your views, not alone on I.L.G.O.U. but on Trade Union and Local Government affairs in general.

In the fifty years since it was founded—an occasion we will celebrate at a later date this year—the I.L.G.O.U. has grown from an organisation comprising one small branch to its present size and stature. This is indeed a tribute to the founders and to the dedication of members over the fifty-year period. As Branch Annual General Meetings for 1969 approach, I should like to ask all members to consider seriously if they are playing their part in full. Too much still has to be done by too few. To the officers of all branches who devote so much of their time and energies to the service to the Union we are deeply indebted. Without them this Union could not function. Too often they receive only the criticism and too rarely the gratitude of the members. I take this opportunity of recording my own appreciation of the work which, individually and collectively, they perform.

In conclusion, in wishing our new 'FORUM' every success, may I join you in thanking our Head Office staff for their efforts on our behalf. With their guidance and the co-operation of all, this Union will continue to grow firm in the belief that in unity lies strength.

Yours very sincerely,
E. OWENS, President.

The Publishers do not necessarily agree with views expressed by contributors. Comments and criticism are always welcome.

page three

A committed union activist, Evelyn became the first woman president of the ILGOU from 1967. She was appointed as a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions ICTU Public Services Committee and Women's Advisory Committee, serving as chair from 1968-1971. Her contribution to both was significant. She gave evidence to the Commission on the Status of Women and was a member of the Council for the Status of Women CSW from its formation in 1973.

Evelyn and O'Sullivan met in the Anchor Hotel, Parnell Square, where he gave her assurances that they would have his full support if the women stayed within the ILGOU. The death of McGonigal meant a new Arbitrator, Richard Cooke SC, could effectively start from scratch. Donegal County Council, prompted by County Secretary Austin Sharkey asked the Minister to apply the male rates to all existing staff, plus the recently agreed 12% under the ninth round national pay agreement.

Driving force

The emerging 'fudge' from these developments meant that the women stayed in the ILGOU. However, it was not until *after* the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act (1974) and the Employment Equality Act (1977) that women finally received full and equal treatment. The AWOLAI faded away and Evelyn became deeply involved across the full spectrum of interests in the ILGOU. The AWOLAI remain a unique organisation in the struggle for equal pay and equal treatment.

Evelyn was a radicalising influence within public service trade unionism, challenging its traditional, respectful conservatism. She was a driving force in recruiting women and men into the union. She fought for clerk-typists and other neglected grades, demanding that the 'union show its teeth' on their behalf. Members' confidence in her ability was reflected in her election as ILGOU President in 1967, the first woman to hold the office. In 1971, seconded by Des Connolly, Evelyn moved a motion at the Local Government and Public Services Union (LGPSU) conference calling for the removal of the marriage bar across the public service. This was finally achieved in 1977.

Labour senator

Politically, Evelyn was active in the Labour Party and held various offices including chair of the Labour National Women's Council. Throughout her political career, she was ably supported by Frank Cluskey who shared her concerns about inequality and exploitation, from whatever source. In 1969, she was nominated by the ICTU as a candidate for the Seanad Labour Panel and was duly elected for two terms, 1969-1977, becoming the first women to be elected as Leas-Cathaoirleach from 1973 to 1977.

James Dooge, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad, was regularly absent on European business, so Evelyn presided over much Seanad business and, on a number of occasions, was signatory to newly enacted legislation.[14] She was not returned in the 1977 Senate elections. The LGPSU felt her original nomination to the Senate had been "in recognition of her pioneering work in equal pay and also in recognition of the role of public service unions in Irish political and social life."[15]

Houses of the Oireachtas
Tithe an Oireachtais

In 1969 Evelyn was nominated by ICTU as a candidate for the Seanad Labour Panel and was duly elected for two terms, 1969-1977, becoming the first woman to be elected as Leas-Cathaoirleach from 1973 to 1977.

Evelyn's comments on the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Bill, debated in Seanad Eireann on Wednesday, 29 May 1974.

"The biggest criticism of the Bill is that when it becomes operative in 1975 it will have but a limited effect. Senator Yeats read out figures relative to the differences between male and female wages I do not want to go over those figures again. There has been a lot of fuss over the title of the Bill. As far as the majority of the women of Ireland are concerned they would not care if this Bill was called the "Barbed Wire Act" or anything else so long as it gave them economic equality. The Bill is confined to an equal pay concept and therefore it has left out the vast majority of workers, and mostly the lower-paid workers. The Bill will achieve its purpose in respect of what one might call the "white-collar worker" because equality is going to be fairly easily established there and in some other areas in industry.

The situation in the Irish workforce at the moment is, of course, that women are confined to jobs traditionally held by women and men are in male jobs. By some marvellous coincidence, which I am sure the House will appreciate, men's wages just happen to be that much higher than women's wages. There will be little basis on which we can establish equal value or light work. Therefore the vast majority of women in industry will not be dealt with by this Bill."

Evelyn served on the Oireachtas Committee on Statutory Instruments, 1969-1973, and, ex officio, the Committee on Procedure and Privileges, 1973-1977. She was a member of the Special Advisory Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman, first created in 1984; and acted as chair to the National Minimum Wage Commission, 1997-1998. She also sat on the committee that led to the creation of the National Centre for Partnership and Performance in 2001.

Labour Court

In 1984, Evelyn was appointed by Minister for Labour Ruairí Quinn to the Labour Court as Deputy Chair. In August 1994 she succeeded Kevin Heffernan and became Chair. She was regarded by industrial relations practitioners on both sides of the table as fair, capable and effective. There were significant strikes in Irish Steel, Team Aer Lingus and Packard Electric in 1994, in Dunne's Stores and Irish Press Newspapers in 1995 which created challenging demands for the Court's new Chair. A mission statement and updated reporting formats for its business provided a 'broader and more informative' view of the Court, Evelyn being accredited with a modernising leadership.[16]

Evelyn was deputy chair of the Labour Court from 1984, and was its chairperson from 1994 until 1998. She was regarded by industrial relations practitioners on both sides of the table as fair, capable and effective.

As Chairperson of the Labour Court Evelyn gave the 21st Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture, The Labour Court: Past, Present and Future, 1996.

"In its first fifty years, the Labour Court has issued as many as 19,000 recommendations and other decisions directly involving perhaps 1.7 million people and indirectly involving many more. During that time, it has shown its flexibility and that it can adapt to the changing demands on its resources.

These demands are constantly changing due to developments in various areas: economic and social, legal and political, and many more. Looking back at its work over the past fifty years, I think it is true to say that the Labour Court has achieved a great deal in the development of the disputes settlement process in industrial relations in Ireland and the establishment of a body of case law in equality issues. Will it continue to do so over the next fifty years? I think that it will."

Although guarded by her status as Chair, Evelyn's gave her considered view on the Labour Court and its role in her Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture, 'The Labour Court: Past, Present and Future' in 1996.[17]

Retirement

After her retirement in 1998, she joined the Boards of Beaumont Hospital and the Irish Medical Council, her long experience of public administration and service proving useful and impressive assets.

Evelyn had a commanding, slightly distant presence and was always impressively dressed. She was businesslike, thorough and clearly not 'someone to be messed with'.

Privately, she was a concerned and caring friend, good-humoured and excellent company. Evelyn loved to travel, and in the company of her old Corporation friend, Kay Heffernan, they visited Alaska, Peru and the Middle East.

Evelyn died in St Colmcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown, on 26th September, 2010. Labour Party Leader, Éamon Gilmore, said she had "an outstanding record in different walks of life and praised her life-long commitment to challenging social inequality."[18]

Her union described her as a "woman of courage amd conviction. A committed trade unionist and tireless campaigner for women's and workers' rights, she holds a special place in IMPACT's history".[19]

Indeed, she holds a special place in labour history generally, as a courageous pioneer for working women's equality, unafraid to fight within and without her union.

Sheila Simmons and Francis Devine

Francis Devine, retired trade union tutor, is currently researching the history of the postal workers trade union.

Sheila Simmons, a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, Institute of Public Administration and Stanford University, was a founder member of the Active Retirement Movement and member of the former National Council on Ageing and Pensioner representative on the IMPACT Executive. Since early retirement from Dún Laoghaire Corporation, she has acted as a voice for older people at international, European and national levels as Director, Irish Association of Older People and of the European Anti-Poverty Network. She was active in the ILGOU/LGPSU/IMPACT, serving at branch and executive levels, and in 1963 helped establish the AWOLAI.

"Evelyn Owens came into the Private Members bar on the evening of Budget day, February, 1982. No longer a member of the Seanad, she was there to pick up on the political news and gossip of the day. I was there, and not in the Dáil Chamber, as I was now a senator, having lost my Dáil seat the previous June, along with Frank Cluskey. Evelyn and Frank were close political friends and that was how I first got to know her some years previously.

I had joined the LGPSU when I worked in Dublin Corporation's housing architects' department in the early 1970s but I did not meet Evelyn at that time.

Within the labour movement she was a strong character and highly regarded. Her contributions to annual conference were an impressive combination of passion and practicality.

As we sat talking the bells rang for a vote on a Budget motion. After the vote, the old black and white TV monitor screen was then changed with a new piece of information. This caught Evelyn's eye and, as a former Ceann Comhairle, she said that something must have happened in the Dáil.

It had, the financial motion to increase VAT on clothes and shoes had been defeated. The Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald was now on his feet informing the House that he would be asking the President to call a general election.

As I rushed out of the bar to make arrangements for the snap election, Evelyn wished me luck.

Two years later, I was Minister for Labour and I subsequently appointed Evelyn to be the first woman to be vice chair of the Labour Court. When she asked me why, I reminded her of her lifelong commitment to feminism and the rights of women in the workplace. She held her work farewell function in the Oak room of the Mansion House which I attended. I knew many of the officials present and just before she addressed the gathering she said to me, with a twinkle in her eye, that many of her senior male colleagues, most of whom were still in the room, still could not figure out why she had been appointed to the board of the Labour Court."

Ruairi Quinn TD, Minister for Education and Skills.

Photo courtesy of Oireachtas Eireann

Commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the 1918 election (held on 14th December 1918), the first in which women had the right to vote. Constance Markiewicz was elected as the first woman T.D. and M.P. All current and living former women deputies and senators were invited to attend a celebration ceremony. Picture taken in 2008.

"I first met Evelyn during the campaign against the introduction of differentiated pay scales for men and women clerical officers in 1963-64.

In 1965 she became my boss in the housing allocation department of Dublin Corporation. One of her first acts as grade VI was to roster women clerical officers to interview housing applicants. The norm had been that only men attended the public counter. She also encouraged us to study and apply for promotion, as the accepted practice was that females got married and left because of the marriage bar.

At Evelyn's invitation, I attended the 1969 union conference in Dublin as a guest and in 1970 I ran for election to the branch committee. I later became an officer of the branch and the union official.

Without Evelyn my career would have taken a different path. She was my boss, my mentor but, most of all, my best friend for over 40 years. She spent her life unselfishly in the service of others."

Alice Moore, Evelyn's friend and former colleague in Dublin Corporation and assistant general secretary in the LGPSU and IMPACT.

Notes

1 Seanad Eireann debate 12 July 1972, Vol 73, No 5.

2 Séamus and Marie predeceased her and she was survived by Gerard, Ita (Corcoran) and Nuala (Grouse), 'Ex-Labour Senator scored many firsts for women', *Irish Times*, 2 October, 2010, www.irishtimes.com/ newspaper/obituaries/2010/1002/index.html See also Charles Callan & Barry Desmond, *Irish Labour Lives: A Biographical Dictionary of Irish Labour Party Deputies, Senators, MPs & MEPs*, (Dublin, 2010), pp. 231-232.

3 The Local Government Officials (Ireland) Trade Union was formed in 1901 as the Dublin Municipal Officers' Association, becoming the Municipal Officers (Ireland) Trade Union in 1919 and registered on 4 November, 1920, 338T. In July 1920, the MOITU amalgamated with the Local Government Officials (Ireland) Trades Union which had been formed earlier that year, 348T. It was affiliated to ITUC/ICTU, 1935. It changed its name to the Irish Local Government Officials' Union, 1926; and Local Government & Public Services Union in 1971. It absorbed the Assistant County Surveyors' Association in 1950s. At the time of amalgamation to form IMPACT (Irish Municipal, Public & Civil Trade Union) in 1991, it represented 15,000 members in the health services, local government and in a broad range of state and voluntary bodies.

4 www.nwci.ie/about/history.html

5 John P. Swift's, *Striking A Chord: A History of Irish Musicians' Unions*, (Watchword, Dublin, 2012).

6 Sheila Simmons to Séamus Cody, IMPACT, 22 February, 2011.

7 Martin Maguire, *Servants to the Public: A History of the LGPSU, 1901-1990*, (Dublin, 1998), pp. 168-179.

8 All were Clerical Officers in Dublin Corporation or Dublin Health Authority, save Simmons who was employed by Dún Laoghiare Corporation. Simmons recalls Kate McCarron as the 'most Senior Executive Officer in Dublin Corporation and subsequently the Health Board. It was a pretty tricky situation for her. Women activists met in her home and she provided all the hospitality with good advice thrown in by her Jesuit bother, Father Seán'.

9 Owens once told Francis Devine that this was the nearest she got to achieving Peggy Seeger's feminist anthem, 'I'm Gonna Be an Engineer'.

10 Acting General Secretary Anne Dunne's name was appended.

11 Organisers were Owens, Burleigh, Ryder, Simmons and Longford Branch member Mary Lynch.

12 AWOLAI was, in it actions, a trade union body but it was not seen as such by its participants. Sheila Simmons saw it as 'an Association' that 'for cogent reasons never registered as a Trade Union'. What path it might have followed had it not succeeded in its immediate ambition is a matter of conjecture.

13 Eithne Kane was a young Clerical Officer then undertaking an evening Commerce course at UCD at her own expense.

14 James Clement Dooge, 30 July, 1922-20 August, 2010 was an engineer, climatologist and hydrologist and Professor of Engineering in University College Cork and University College Dublin. He was President, International Council for Science and the Royal Irish Academy. He worked for UNESCO, World Meteorological Organisation and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Food & Agricultural Oganisation (FAO). Dooge was Cathaoirleach, Seanad Éireann, 1 June, 1973-27 October, 1977, and Minister for Foreign Affairs, 21 October, 1981-9 March, 1982. He chaired the report that led to the Single European Act and Maastricht Treaty.

15 Maguire, *op. cit*., p. 204.

16 Ian Finlay, *The Labour Court: '... Not an Ordinary Court of Law': A History of Fifty Years of the Labour Court from 1946 to 1996*, (Dublin, 1996), pp. 91-99. See also, www.labourcourt.ie/

17 Irish Association for Industrial Relations, 21st Countess Markievicz Memorial lecture, 18 November, 1996, www2.ul.ie/pdf/220953261.pdf The lecture was delivered at the AIB Bankcentre, Blackrock.

18 www.labour.ie/press/listing/128560958419578002.html

19 'Evelyn Owens'. *Work & Life*, issue 12, Spring 2011, p. 42.

Evelyn was a woman of courage and conviction. A committed trade unionist and tireless campaigner for women's and workers' rights. She holds a special place in IMPACT's history and will be fondly remembered as an inspiration by her friends and colleagues.

IMPACT

Produced by:
IMPACT Communications Unit,
Nerney's Court, Dublin 1. 01-817-1500

Designed by:
N. O'Brien Design, Jamestown Business Park, Dublin 11.
01-864-1920