

Martin Maguire, *Fighting for the Clerical Grades: A History of the Civil, Public and Services Union, 1922-2017*, pp.xi,414, Institute of Public Administration, Dublin 2022.

Martin Maguire over the past two and a half decades has mined and refined an extensive body of Irish civil service history since his first such study, that of the Local Government and Public Services Union, entitled *Servants to the Public* (Dublin 1998). Then came his pioneering *The Civil Service and the Revolution in Ireland, 1912-38: 'Shaking the blood-stained hand of Mr Collins'* (Manchester 2008), a truly original, ground-breaking study. There soon followed his 'Gladstone and the Irish Civil Service' in George Boyce & Alan O'Day, eds., *Gladstone and Ireland: Politics, Religion and Nationality in the Victorian Age* (Basingstoke 2010). Around the same time came his articles on 'Civil service trade unionism in Ireland' which were published in *Saothar* 33 and 34. These were quickly followed by his *Scientific Service: A history of the Union of Professional and Technical Civil Servants, 1920-1990* (Dublin 2010).

This latest book is a detailed study of the most hard done-by body of state and public service workers, the clerical grades, the majority of whom throughout that history were women. It is based on an exhaustive search of primary and secondary sources, in London, Warwick, Belfast as well as in Dublin, and not least on the archives of the Irish Labour History Society. The author adopts a largely chronological approach, establishing the decade by decade struggle of these workers for recognition and a fair deal. Some struggle it proved: it involved not just the obdurate resistance of politicians and of the key element of the state administration in the shape of the Department of Finance, but also, and as much, the hostility of the self-regarding higher grades of the service. Indeed, as Maguire amply demonstrates, it was as much a cultural as an economic, labour or political struggle since it also involved a struggle against misogyny, not least within the broader trade union movement and, at times, within the union or association itself. Indeed, one of the remarkable aspects of the story he unfolds is the fact that a body whose main component was female, throughout its history was led exclusively by men as general secretaries. It is not really until after 1980 that its outstanding female members came to the fore: Rosaleen Glackin as industrial secretary and deputy general secretary, Theresa Dwyer as Equality Officer, Angela Cassidy, Carol O'Reilly, Geraldine Burke-Geary, Betty Tyrrell-Collard and Ann McGee to name but a few.

The history of this organisation is, by definition, so fundamentally embedded in the history of the Irish state at its core that the work becomes as much a history of that state, its political parties and leaders as the history of a labour organisation. In short, the work is very well contextualised. The foundation of the Irish Free State brought no joy to the CPSU's predecessor body, the Civil Service Clerical Association founded in 1921. Together with similar civil and public service bodies it faced a hostile state which soon imposed what the author describes as 'a relentless series of wage cuts'.(p.40). It seemed, as Maguire starkly puts it, that 'national freedom meant an attack on workers, on trade unions and on the civil service'.(p.59). So, when it came to the politicians, he adeptly brings out some of the more startling contradictions: for example, one of the first acts of Michael Collins as Minister for Finance was to bring over from the British Government as his top civil servant, a Whitehall conservative, Cornelius Gregg; and again, later, in 1924, the new Irish government brought over from Whitehall as Head of the Establishment Division in the Department of Finance, one Henry Boland, 'conservative to the core' and who 'did not bother to conceal his contempt for the lower grades of the civil service'. (p.61). Later on while Fianna Fail seemed initially more sympathetic to the lower orders and even to the lower orders of civil servants than had its preceding Cumann na nGaedhael administration, it is remarkable that Sean MacEntee who began political life in James Connolly's Socialist Party of Ireland, became the most bitter and pugnacious opponent of trade union organisation in the civil service when he held a vice-like grip on the Department of Finance as its Minister. Further on again, in the 1980s, it was ironic that it was not the 'liberal' Garret Fitzgerald as Minister for Finance and as Taoiseach, but rather the less

lionised Charlie Haughey who took a genuine interest in positive relations with the labour movement.

The dominant themes of this important work are four: the CPSU's struggle for survival, the quest for a Conciliation and Arbitration process, the endless campaign for a decent income and the struggle for equality as against gender discrimination. From remote origins in 1893 as a group of civil service assistant clerks in Dublin Castle who first began agitation for better treatment, through the 1903 Assistant Clerks Association, then their 1921 Civil Service Clerical Association, (CSCA) and on into 1973 to the Civil and Public Service Staff Association (CPSSA), the 1983 Civil and Public Services Staff Union, the 1989 Civil & Public Services Union (CPSU) and finally down to the Civil, Public & Services Union (CPSU), this workers' organisation in its various iterations found no easy path to survival or growth: as the author suggests, the work that emerges is more a history of struggle than of organisation. Early victories were never a guarantee of sustained success: thus, the early achievement of the right to negotiate directly with the Treasury, independently of the domineering higher grade bodies, via the apparatus of the Whitley Councils, was soon 'snatched away' by the newly formed independent Irish government. Not till the introduction of a very limited scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration in July 1949 did the union begin to enjoy significant growth: from a stagnant 1,500 members over 1930 to 1950 it grew to some 3,600 by 1970; but the main breakthrough came from the 1970s with the expansion of state services and the end of the marriage ban for female civil servants. But it was not always onwards and upwards as by 2013 membership began to fall and this decline was a major factor in promoting the discussions that led to the merger with IMPACT and the creation of FORSA on 1 January 2018.

Again, the achievement of gender equality came not because of government action but more in spite of government inaction and one of the most interesting features of the present work is its account of the way in which litigation and recourse to Europe and European legislation forced the hands of reluctant Irish governments. It was perhaps a fitting end to the CPSU's quest for gender equality that its last president, Ann McGee, became the first president of FORSA in May 2018. The central thesis of Maguire's present work is that the civil and public service associations of which the CPSU was a substantial constituent, played a truly significant yet under-acknowledged role in the creation of the modern Irish labour movement whose earlier historiography tended to be dominated by Larkin and the general labour unions. This latest volume confirms Maguire as the foremost historian of Irish civil and public services trade unionism.