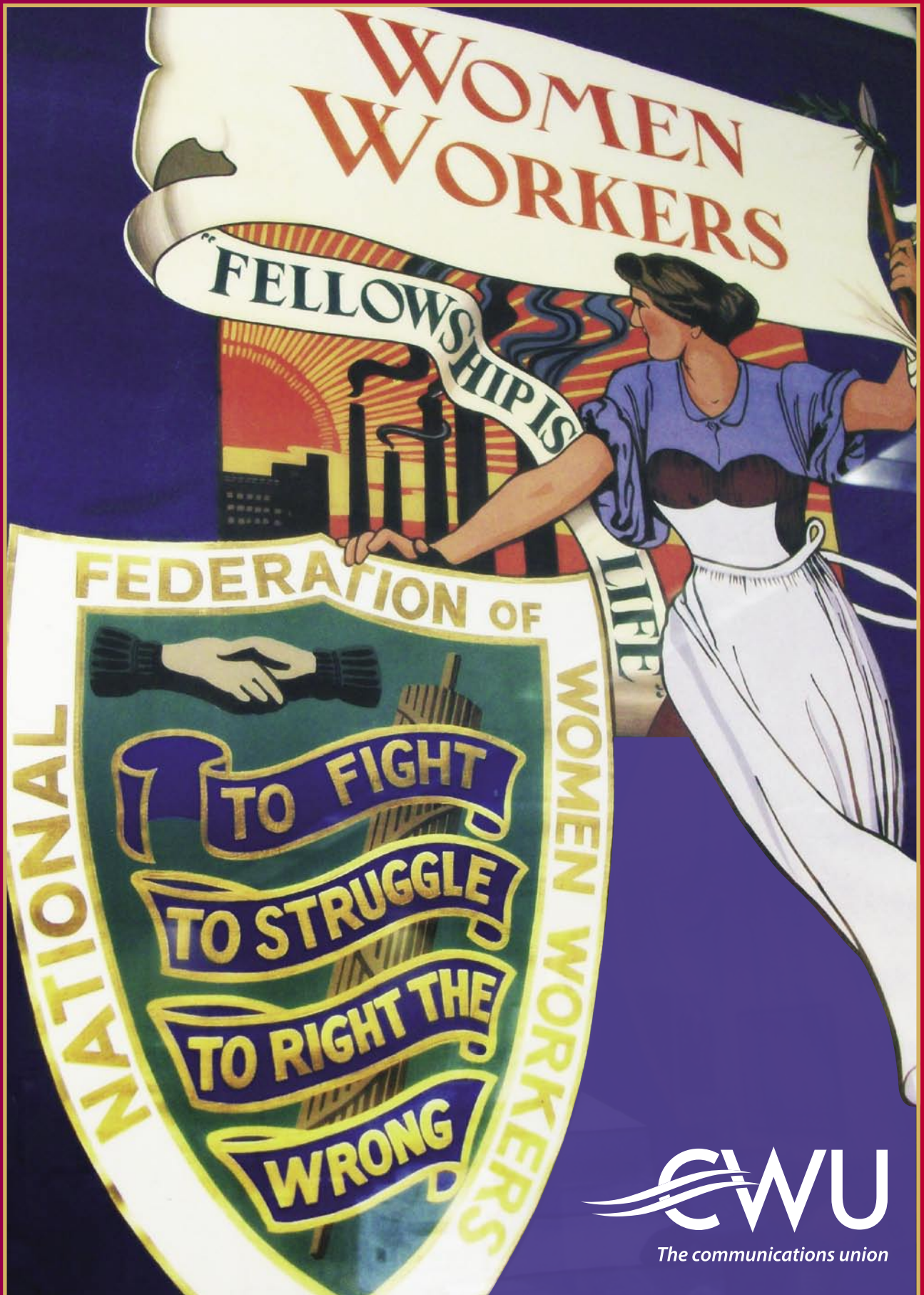


HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



CWU
The communications union

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present to you a compilation of profiles that outline the unquestionable role that women have played vis-à-vis the struggle to gain significant rights within the employment field.

The struggles highlighted date back to 1905 when the Chain-makers Strike took place and is now celebrated every September at the now famous Festival in the Dudley.

This initiative arose from a motion submitted by the Birmingham, Black Country & Worcester branch at the 2008 Women's Conference. Clearly this dossier is not exhaustive but is intended to give a strong flavour relating to the undoubted role that women have played in the Labour movement.

We hope you find it both enjoyable and educational.

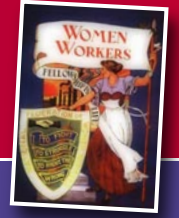
Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Roy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the word "Roy".

Linda Roy

Assistant Secretary, Equality Officer

HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



CRADLEY HEATH'S WOMEN CHAINMAKERS STRIKE

History

During the industrial revolution, iron working and particularly chain making was the main source of employment for people living in Cradley Heath in the Black Country. It was a very successful industry that at its height was providing 1,000 tons of chains each week.

Women made up about two-thirds of the workforce in the small shops and most of these women were over 70 years of age while some were less than fifteen years old. The women chainmakers worked under atrocious conditions with shifts lasting over 12 hours and poverty wages. One writer referred to these women as "The White Slaves of England" because they were "bound more by chronic hunger than by their iron link".

Right to Earn a Living Wage

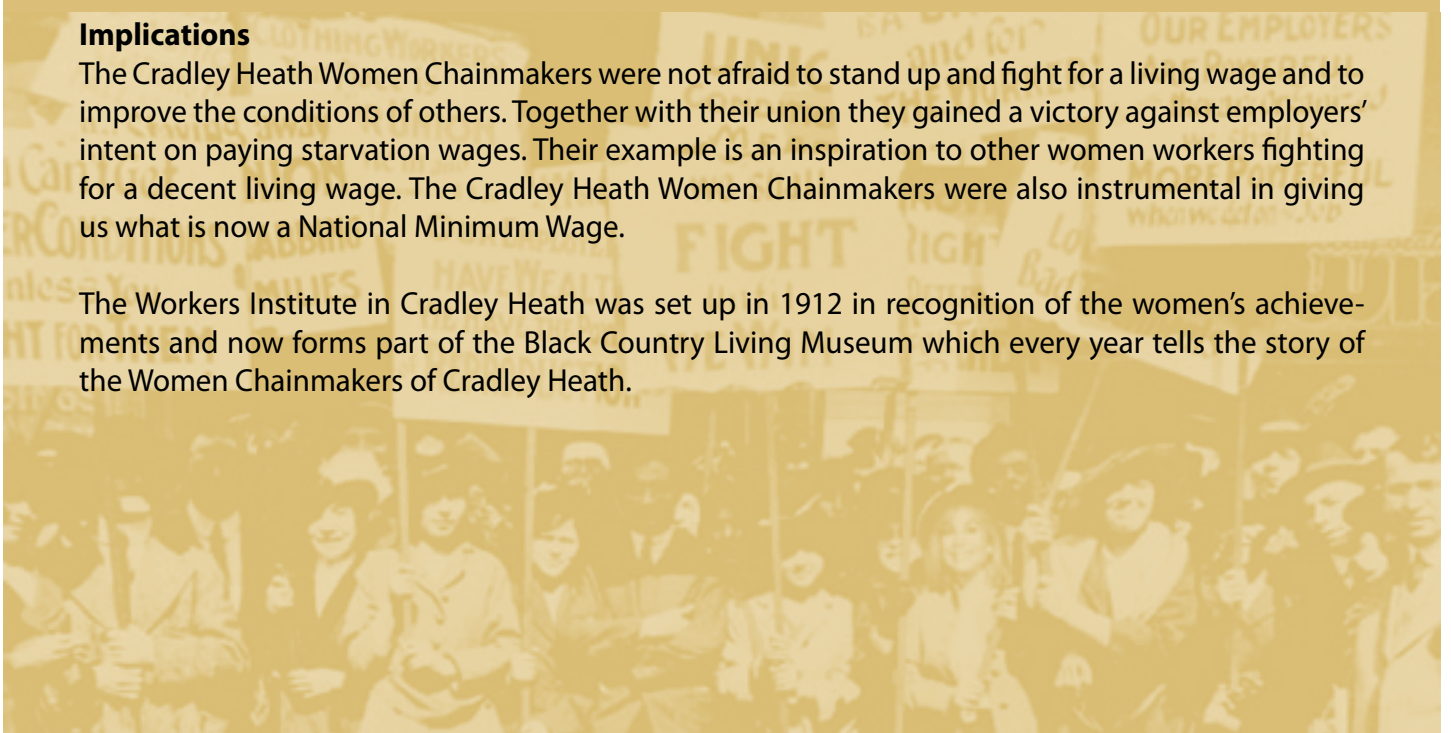
In the shops where women were mainly employed, fierce competition led factory owners to reduce wages and use a variety of tricks to keep wages low. In response to their miserable plight, Mary Macarthur helped to form the National Federation of Women Workers and the Women's Chain Making organisation in 1905. In the light of their campaign the government became increasingly interested in their working conditions.

But any negotiations to improve wages were resisted by the employers who argued that higher wages would make them vulnerable to foreign competition and the loss of jobs. Despite employers' opposition, a wage settlement was agreed in the spring of 1910. But fierce competition in the industry led employers to find loopholes in the agreement and use a variety of methods to ensure many women were deprived of improved wages. As a result, Mary Macarthur and other women workers organised strike action to fight for a living wage. Over the 10 week strike period many donors supported the women, including George Cadbury and John Galsworthy. Total donations amounted to £3,000 (the equivalent of a quarter of a million pounds today).

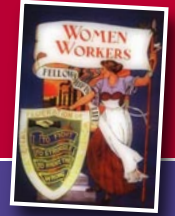
Implications

The Cradley Heath Women Chainmakers were not afraid to stand up and fight for a living wage and to improve the conditions of others. Together with their union they gained a victory against employers' intent on paying starvation wages. Their example is an inspiration to other women workers fighting for a decent living wage. The Cradley Heath Women Chainmakers were also instrumental in giving us what is now a National Minimum Wage.

The Workers Institute in Cradley Heath was set up in 1912 in recognition of the women's achievements and now forms part of the Black Country Living Museum which every year tells the story of the Women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath.



HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



HULL FISH PACKERS

History

The 1975 Equal Pay Act had little impact on some industries as many companies still operated job segregation which meant that men and women were on separate pay rates with invariably lower rates paid to women. It was not uncommon for men to be paid more than women, even in work places where women outnumbered men. One such industry was fish packing in Hull where approximately 70% of members of the Transport and Workers General Union (T&G) were women. In 1984 Mrs. Wells and fifteen of her colleagues, supported by her union, challenged their pay situation at an Industrial (now Employment) Tribunal and by April 1985 had secured a successful outcome.

Equal Pay

Mrs. Wells and her colleagues were employed as fish packers doing various combinations of packing duties, something they believed was similar to their comparator – a male labourer. The T&G Hull Fish Packers Union representative (Pete Allen) decided that it was time to look after the interests of the women by eradicating the wage differences between the sexes.

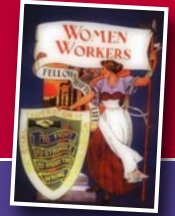
In *Wells V Smales*, the union (with the help of the Equal Opportunities Commission), submitted equal pay claims to an Industrial Tribunal on behalf of Mrs Wells and fifteen fish packers. The company denied that the work was of equal value. They argued that if the work was found to be of equal value, the difference was due to a genuine material factor (GMF) and had nothing to do with the gender of the jobholders.

Due to the nature of the claims the Tribunal referred the case to a panel of Independent Experts appointed by ACAS. These experts were given the task of identifying a number of factors which would go into evaluating the work of the claimants and their comparators. This was not a straight forward task as there were a number of complications resulting in different job evaluation scores for the claimants. However, one of the claimants argued that in a job evaluation scheme there had to be a range within which each grade falls and she set out examples of the various ranges to which she believed each grade should be allocated. The lawyer for Smales argued against this on the grounds that for the jobs to be of equal value they must be exactly equal in worth. However, the tribunal adopted a "broad brush approach" and found that the work of nine of the women was of equal value to that of the male labourer.

Implications

Through their trade union the women fish packers were given a voice to articulate their concerns in ways they had not thought possible and as a result were instrumental in changing history and employment law. The successful outcome of the case paved the way for other workers in the same industry to take similar claims and for tribunals to adopt a broad brush approach to cases of equal value. The story of the Hull fish packers shows the vital role of trade unions in promoting the equality agenda and although the case is over 20 years, equal pay for work of equal value between men and women is still an issue that needs to be challenged in the workplace.

HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



BELFAST CLEANERS

History

In 1984 the Equal Value Amendment to the Equal Pay Act was passed in Northern Ireland. This paved the way for Mary McAuley and four of her colleagues, who all worked as Domestic Assistants at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, to take a test case on the basis they were being paid less than a domestic porter and groundsman. The five women believed that their work was of equal value to their male counterparts.

Supported by their union and the then Equal Opportunities Commission (now Equality Commission), they submitted claims in December 1984. But it was not until 1995, some 11 years later that the parties agreed to a settlement and not until 2000 that the domestic servants finally won their long fought battle to receive the same rate of pay as their male comparators.

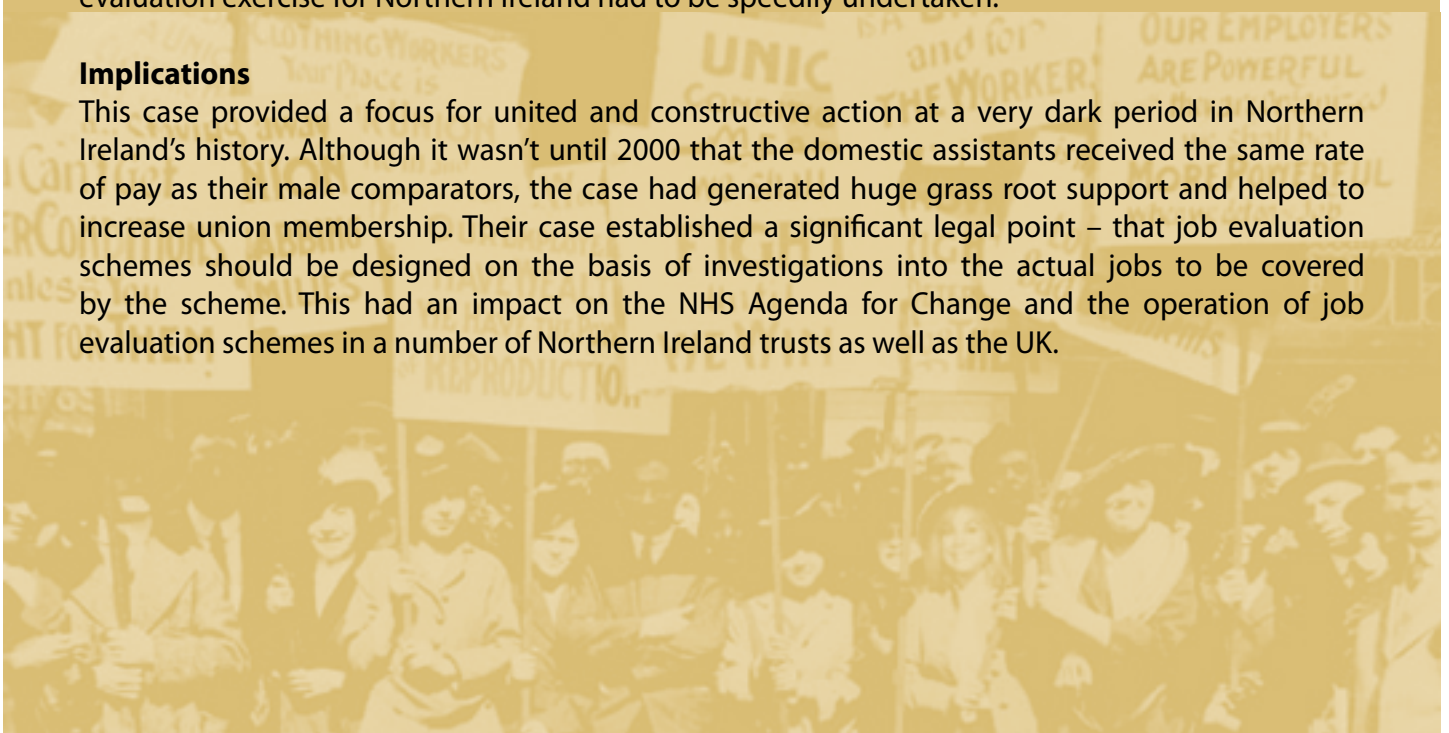
The Equal Pay Claims

Between 1948 – when the National Health Service was established – and 1970, blue collar workers and ancillary jobs were heavily gender segregated and it was common practice for men to be paid more than women for doing the same job. However things changed with the passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970. This provided for equal pay to be implemented by 1975 for “like work” and “work rated as equivalent” under a job evaluation scheme (JES). The JES for Great Britain which covered ancillary workers in Northern Ireland placed domestic assistants in lower grades than porters and ground staff. Whilst the domestic assistant roles in Northern Ireland were somewhat similar to those evaluated in the GB scheme, in some respects the comparator jobs were different from their GB equivalents. The claimants therefore had to show that the job evaluation scheme, as it impacted on them and the comparator jobs, was fundamentally flawed and did not apply in Northern Ireland.

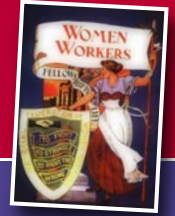
Although the tribunal did not agree the scheme was defective it did accept that the job evaluation scheme had not been developed for the health service jobs in Northern Ireland. As a result a job evaluation exercise for Northern Ireland had to be speedily undertaken.

Implications

This case provided a focus for united and constructive action at a very dark period in Northern Ireland's history. Although it wasn't until 2000 that the domestic assistants received the same rate of pay as their male comparators, the case had generated huge grass root support and helped to increase union membership. Their case established a significant legal point – that job evaluation schemes should be designed on the basis of investigations into the actual jobs to be covered by the scheme. This had an impact on the NHS Agenda for Change and the operation of job evaluation schemes in a number of Northern Ireland trusts as well as the UK.



HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



CRITCHLEY STRIKERS

History

In May 1993 Critchley Labels took over a group of workers once employed by BT and represented by the Communications Workers Union (CWU). As part of the negotiations, BT was assured that existing employment conditions, the recognition agreement and staff numbers would not be altered. In the summer of 1994 CWU members agreed with the company a voluntary redundancy package which resulted in a 30% reduction in staff. But a few months after the redundancy package was agreed management said they intended to de-recognise the CWU. Following a vote for industrial action an agreement was reached with the company which maintained union recognition.

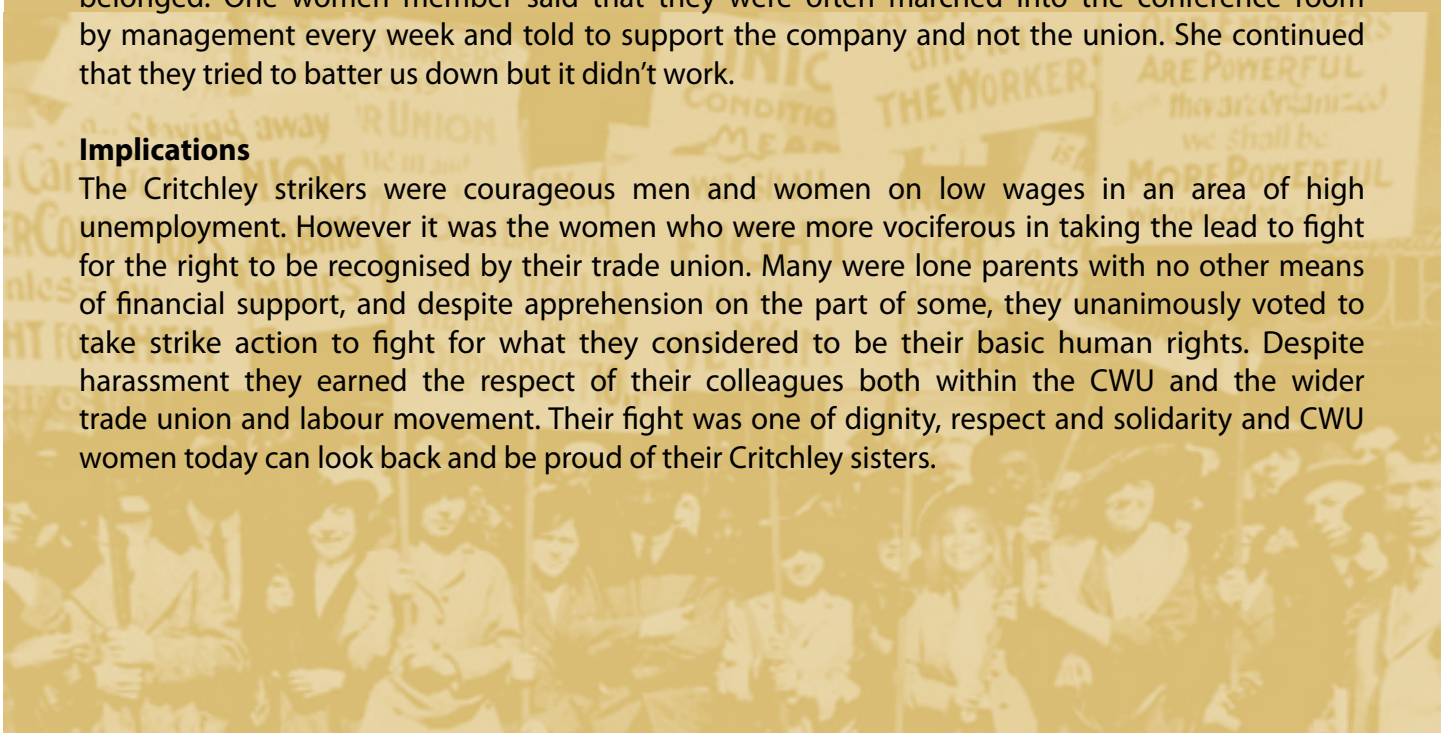
Despite this Critchley Labels were still determined to de-recognise the union. Industrial relations problems continued and over the next three years there were a number of compulsory redundancies, strikes and overtime bans. Growing industrial relations problems eventually culminated in the sacking of 31 CWU members on 6th February 1997 after they had taken protest action to defend their right to be represented by their union. For the following 28 months, the CWU members in South Wales went on strike to highlight their plight. Those at the forefront of the strike were mainly women such as Sue Hoskins, Annie Owen, Alison Hopkins, Joanne Brewster, Carol Davis, Wendy Williams and many others. These told their own stories, one of union bashing and intimidation before an agreement was reached to settle the strike at the end of 1999 which saw some members being given employment in BT, Royal Mail and elsewhere while others took redundancy.

The Fight to be Represented

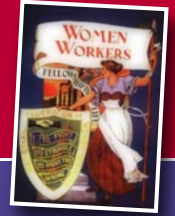
The mainly 31 CWU women members with a total of 471 years loyal service between them had actively engaged with the company to keep it viable. However what they were not prepared to do was to give up their right for trade union recognition and their right to take industrial action. Sue Hoskins, Branch Secretary and other women members had no doubt where their loyalty belonged. One women member said that they were often marched into the conference room by management every week and told to support the company and not the union. She continued that they tried to batter us down but it didn't work.

Implications

The Critchley strikers were courageous men and women on low wages in an area of high unemployment. However it was the women who were more vociferous in taking the lead to fight for the right to be recognised by their trade union. Many were lone parents with no other means of financial support, and despite apprehension on the part of some, they unanimously voted to take strike action to fight for what they considered to be their basic human rights. Despite harassment they earned the respect of their colleagues both within the CWU and the wider trade union and labour movement. Their fight was one of dignity, respect and solidarity and CWU women today can look back and be proud of their Critchley sisters.



HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



GATE GOURMET WORKERS

History

Gate Gourmet is a company owned by the US Texas Pacific Group which in 1997 acquired BA's in-house catering. In 2003 the company reported losses and in talks with the Transport and General Workers Union (now Unite) proposed a restructuring package which was subsequently rejected. Following the rejection of the package, Gate Gourmet announced they were bringing in temporary staff without discussions or agreement with the union. This provoked a meeting of Gate Gourmet staff who were told by management that if they did not get back to work within 3 minutes they would be sacked. In total approximately 800 were sacked by the company and escorted off the building. Those who were assembled in the car park were told of their dismissal through megaphone and others on sick and maternity leave were sent letters telling them of their dismissal.

The Significance of the Dispute

At the time Gate Gourmet Catering Assistants earned on average £12,000 a year and drivers around £16,000. Despite low pay the company was trying to push wages even lower by insisting on new terms and conditions for its permanent staff while hiring seasonal workers on inferior terms and conditions.

The majority (70%) of the sacked Gourmet workers were Asian women, who saw the sackings as an attack on their culture, their communities and what they perceived to be a lack of respect. Many believed that their treatment would not have been meted out to white workers. Managers at Gate Gourmet had also underestimated the resilience of the workers and the ties that unite the airport workers of all races, ages, religions and sexes. Heathrow airport draws on the surrounding areas for its workforce. These communities include Southall, Slough, Hounslow, Hayes, Ealing and Brentford which have a high concentration of Asians. Without such workers the airport would come to a standstill which is exactly what happened when the Gate Gourmet workers initially went on strike.

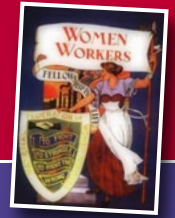
The majority of BA workers regarded the Gate Gourmet employees as part of the family because the bulk of BA's catering work was done by them. Although solidarity action is illegal under UK law (but not so under EU law) many BA workers took solidarity action in support of their Gate Gourmet colleagues.

Following the mass sackings the T&G launched a high profile campaign which had the backing of the local community. The most outspoken of the women, Parmjit Kaur played a key role in speaking out against the disgraceful way Gate Gourmet had treated its mainly Asian workers. As a result of the campaign 290 workers eventually returned to Gate Gourmet, 424 received payments totalling £3.18m in compensation and a few cases were put in the hands of solicitors.

Implications

This case showed the cynical lengths companies like Gate Gourmet can use to get rid of its workforce. It had planned its actions a year in advance and used the loopholes in the legal frame work to set up sub-contracting firms to supply cheaper replacement labour. The case clearly exposed the defects in UK employment law and underlined the importance of ensuring that UK employment law complies with the entire international labour conventions to which the UK is signatory. It also shows that women regardless of colour, religious affiliation and ethnic background are prepared to stand up and fight for what they believe in when it matters most.

HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



TRIVIRIX CWU MEMBERS

History

Trivirix International is an American medical equipment manufacturer. Prior to the purchase of its Springvale factory, West Belfast in 2002, BT owned the site. The factory employed approximately 110 workers who were largely members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU). On 20th February 2006, four years after setting up the Springvale factory, Trivirix International announced, without warning that its UK subsidiary was going into administration with immediate effect and in April 2006 the company ceased business at the Springvale site.

The Importance of Having a Trade Union

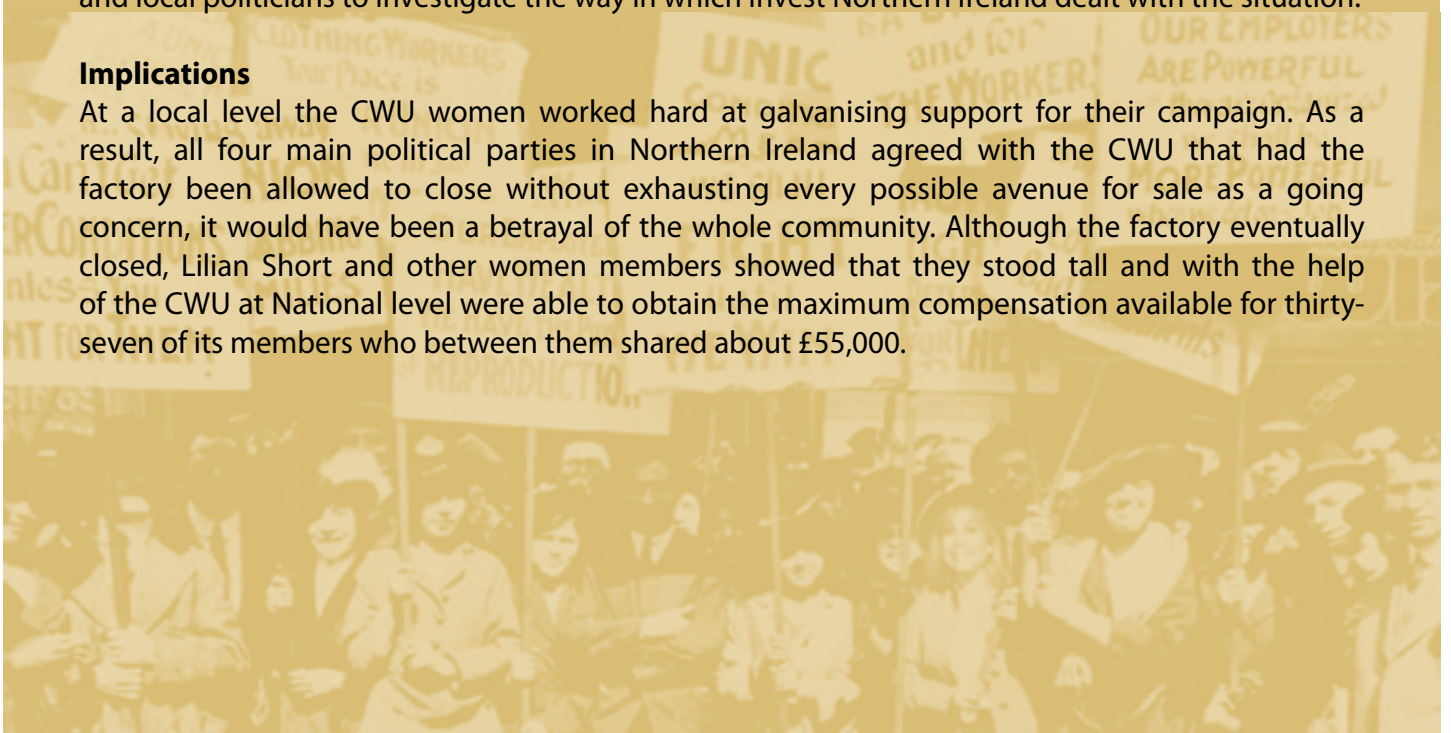
Upon being told that the company would go into administration, CWU launched a campaign which was led by its mainly women members to ensure the factory remained open. This was a key issue for the union because the factory was located in an area of high unemployment (13%) The Trivirix site was also of critical, symbolic importance to all communities as it was sited on the peace line between the Falls and Shankhill Roads.

At the local level women such as Lilian Short, the former representative was instrumental in keeping CWU members focused on their fight to keep the factory open. She rose to the occasion and when the going got tough she grew in stature. The CWU lobbied the Government and the regional development body, Invest Northern Ireland (NI) to help secure financial assistance. The union's persistence and campaigning eventually secured a loan from the Government which meant the factory could continue operating for a further month and the Administrator was able to run the business as a going concern as he sought to identify a buyer.

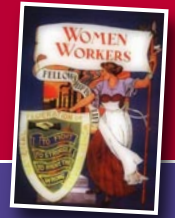
Unfortunately no buyer was found and all 101 employees were eventually made redundant. The union tried to give members the best advice and training to find alternative employment. At the same time it also decided to take legal advice about the lack of consultation and to press national and local politicians to investigate the way in which Invest Northern Ireland dealt with the situation.

Implications

At a local level the CWU women worked hard at galvanising support for their campaign. As a result, all four main political parties in Northern Ireland agreed with the CWU that had the factory been allowed to close without exhausting every possible avenue for sale as a going concern, it would have been a betrayal of the whole community. Although the factory eventually closed, Lilian Short and other women members showed that they stood tall and with the help of the CWU at National level were able to obtain the maximum compensation available for thirty-seven of its members who between them shared about £55,000.



HEROES OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



CWMCARN SOLECTRON, SOUTH WALES

History

The BT Cwmcarn factory which in its last years became known as Solectron, at one time employed over 2000 people. In the early 1990s the members were TUPED over to Standard Telephones and then after a short period on to Nortel. In 2001, they were TUPED from Nortel to Solectron, where some of our members worked for nearly 40 years before the factory finally closed in 2007. During the period 2001–2007 Solectron embarked upon a number of changes including a 'restructuring' programme, redundancies and trying to renege on contractual terms and conditions it had agreed earlier.

Campaign to Save the Factory

Research on the company showed that Solectron was an asset stripper and had perhaps only intended to keep the plant open for a few years. Armed with this information, Kay Harper, Louise Jenkins, CWU National Officers and CWU members put on a brave fight which included campaigns and a massive march and rally in Newport. At the same time CWU at national level was embroiled in a bitter legal wrangle with Solectron when the company tried to renege on contractual terms and conditions granted to former BT employees under BT redundancy terms.

Workers at Solectron knew that the work was being taken abroad where labour costs were cheaper. The women because they were losing their job but were even more incensed because they were being asked to train the very workers who would be taking their jobs from them. The struggle to keep their jobs and take on Solectron became even more intense.

Implications

The company's mission statement based on: "partnership, integrity and ethical business practices", were not borne out by their actions. Neither was the law sufficiently robust to give UK workers the same level of consultation rights as enjoyed in other parts of Europe and, as a result, the company used the legal loophole to their advantage. However, with the solidarity of the CWU members Kay Harper and Louise Jenkins were able to lead at a local level the union's campaigning work. The union at national level were also able to bring a multinational company back to the negotiating table and prevented the immediate closure of the plant. Despite eventual closure some six years later these brave women members showed that they were prepared to fight for what they believed in with dignity and respect under very difficult circumstances.

