MARY GALWAY (1864-1928): Pioneer woman trade unionist

Mary Galway was born in 1864 into a linen weaving family in Moira, Co Down. The Galways move to Belfast and at age 11 Mary started work in the City's linen industry. She was appointed General Secretary of the Irish Textile Operatives' Union in 1897 a position she held until her death in 1928. She spoke out forcefully on behalf of women textile workers, who suffered atrocious working conditions, and she contributed articles on the linen industry to the *Voice of Ireland.* She addressed rallies and collected funds during the Belfast dockers' and carters' strike in 1907.

An active member of the executive of the Belfast Trades Council, she was elected Vice-President of the Irish Trade Union Congress in 1910. In 1911 she had a rift with James Connolly during the linen strike, when he organised some unskilled workers who did not belong to Galway's union. In 1915 she set up a Trade Board for outworkers, the most exploited of the textile workers, and she was largely instrumental in getting the first woman factory inspector appointed in Ireland, having approached in person the President of the Board of Trade in London. She was fundamental in banning the system of the half-timers, whereby children divided their week between the factory and the school, and in reducing the working week by seven hours to forty-eight hours.