

Quigley, Gerry (Edmund Gerard)

by Patrick Maume

Quigley, Gerry (Edmund Gerard) (1928–2003), trade unionist, was born 3 November 1928 in Virginia Street, off Donegall Pass in south Belfast. He was one of seven children of John Joseph Quigley and his wife Margaret (née O'Connor). Quigley was educated at St Mary's Christian Brothers School and St Joseph's College of Education, Belfast.

After four years (1950–53) as a teacher in St Joseph's Primary School, State Street, Belfast (off the Falls Road), Quigley became a full-time union official as northern secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) – a position which he held until 1978. His achievements as a negotiator included major roles in securing equal pay for women teachers in 1955, ending the marriage bar for women teachers in Northern Ireland catholic-maintained schools in 1959, securing 'Burnham equivalence' (equal pay with teachers in England and Wales), removal of the oath of allegiance for teachers, the ending of discrimination in appointments, and the revision of local educational structures. During his twenty-four years as northern secretary, INTO membership grew from 1,200 to 5,400. Quigley joined with his opposite number in the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU; traditionally protestant-dominated as the INTO was predominantly catholic and nationalist), Brian Toms, to establish a joint committee to co-ordinate the two unions' responses. The UTU then co-operated in running the magazine *The Northern Teacher* (founded by the INTO) and joined other teachers' unions in the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council to provide a common front in negotiations.

From the late 1950s Quigley was active in National Unity, a middle-class Belfast-centred discussion group which advocated Irish unity by consent and tried to compensate for the intellectual and organisational shortcomings of the established Nationalist Party (a group of mainly rural MPs with very little in the way of constituency organisation, who confined themselves to the traditional nationalist view that the Northern Ireland state was illegitimate, and made no attempt to appeal to unionists or understand their concerns). National Unity eventually developed into the National Political Front, an umbrella group of nationalists seeking an alternative political approach. Michael McKeown, another founder-member, recalls in his memoir a preliminary meeting in Maghery, Co. Armagh (19 April 1964) where Quigley replied to Nationalist Party hecklers with 'an impassioned attack upon the nationalist politicians and their refusal to organise and brought the house down' (McKeown, 26). When the Front soon collapsed, Quigley was part of the group that organised the National Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP had many teachers among its members and Quigley became its first chairman when it was established in June 1965; it was strongest around Belfast and predominantly middle-class. The NDP merged with the SDLP shortly after the latter party's

formation in 1970. Quigley later made a significant contribution to the reorganisation of Northern Ireland local government through the McCrory Report of 1973 and worked on the drafting of fair employment and equal opportunities legislation. For the rest of his life he remained active in schemes to improve north–south relations; he was a member of the board of Co#Operation North and active in Anglo–Irish Encounter.

His stature in the trade union movement is reflected in the fact that on several occasions he led delegations of shipyard workers (traditionally protestant) to lobby the government in London. Quigley was educational adviser to Ulster Television 1969–77 and served on the Northern Ireland Economic Council and the Chilver committee on higher education.

Quigley was a famously tough negotiator; his *Irish Times* obituary quotes unnamed ‘government circles’ (presumably in the Republic) as saying ‘if you gave Quigley the last word in any dispute, it was the last word’. He was known for his communications skills and attention to detail. He was a member of the Northern Ireland committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions 1971–7 and chairman of the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council 1975–7. In 1978 he was elected general secretary of INTO and oversaw its restructuring and modernisation. He introduced training for staff representatives at school level and the holding of annual education conferences; he was responsible for the publication of the first INTO members’ handbook and took a strong interest in the union’s monthly journal, *An Múinteoir Náisiúnta*. He also led the INTO through a number of major disputes, including one over the age of entry (1981), and a prolonged dispute over the Irish government’s failure to honour an arbitration pay award. Here again his significance extended far beyond his own union; he served on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions executive council 1978–90, and, as ICTU President (1988–9), played a key role in shaping and negotiating with the Irish government the Programme for National Recovery, which contributed to the stabilisation of labour relations and the revival of the Irish economy. He publicly called for the programme to be complemented by an anti#poverty plan with particular reference to long#term unemployment, and he stated that the completion of the European single market should be accompanied by a charter of social rights for workers and consumers. Quigley was a member of the National Economic and Social Council for eight years. On his death one of his successors as INTO northern secretary, Frank Bunting, called him ‘one of the foremost Irish trade union leaders of the post#second world war period’ (*Irish News*, 22 Dec. 2003). He retired as INTO general secretary in 1991.

Quigley received an honorary degree from Queen’s University, Belfast, in 1978 for ‘services to the teaching profession’; in 1984 he became a Fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and in 1992 the NUI awarded him an honorary doctorate. He was fond of classical music and the visual arts, followed horse#racing, and enjoyed Bushmills whiskey in moderation.

He and his wife Kathleen, whom he met while they were trainee teachers at St Joseph's College, were married in 1952 and had four sons and a daughter. He died 19 December 2003.

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Michael McKeown, *The greening of a nationalist* (1986); Donal Nevin (ed.), *Trade union century* (1994); Sarah Ward#Perkins, *Select guide to trade union records in Dublin with details of unions operating in Ireland to 1970* (1996); *Ir. Times*, 20, 25–27 Dec. 2003; *Irish News*, 22 Dec. 2003; *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 Dec. 2003

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