

## **Journalism and emerging professionalism in Ireland: the Association of Irish Journalists 1887-1890**

### **Abstract**

This article examines one of the first attempts by Irish journalists to establish a professional representative organisation. Established in near-tandem and in response to the establishment of the National Association of Journalists of Great Britain in 1884, the Association of Irish Journalists presents a unique insight into early attempts at professionalism by Irish journalists that were ultimately thwarted by the bitter divisions that, amid demands for home rule and a violent campaign for tenant rights, characterised Irish politics and journalism in the late nineteenth century. While no records of the association survive, this article utilises digital newspaper archives to shed light on journalistic practice, solidarity and division amid early attempts at professional organisation among journalists in late nineteenth century Ireland.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Professionalism, Representation, Association, Institute of Journalists, Ireland

### **Introduction**

The development of professional, representative, and trade union organisations for journalists in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain has been well documented (Mansfield 1943; Bundock 1957; Bainbridge 1984; Hampton 1999; Gospill and Neale 2007). Similar developments in Ireland have not been so well examined. The Irish contribution to the creation of the Institute of Journalists has not been recorded in its official history (Bainbridge 1984) and although a recent history of the National Union of Journalists (Gospill and Neale 2007) included a chapter on Ireland its purview dates primarily from the 1960s. This gap in the literature exists despite the fact the much of what happened in Ireland was a result of what first occurred in Britain. It was not, however, simply a case of Irish journalists replicating British initiatives – or at least the local conditions in Ireland prevented this from happening. While British journalists came together in occupational unity before fracturing on whether the interests of journalists were better served by a professional or trade union style organisation (Hampton 1999), in Ireland the fracture occurred along political lines. The rise of the Irish Parliamentary Party, its strong links with a burgeoning provincial press, and its demands for home rule and land reform ensured that attempts to unite editors and journalists of strongly diverging political views were unsuccessful in surmounting the unionist – nationalist divide that characterised Irish society and Irish journalism of the time. Additionally, this split was amplified by disagreement about how Irish journalists should respond to moves towards professionalism in Britain. Nonetheless, the short and turbulent history of the Association of Irish Journalists presents a unique insight into early attempts at professionalism by Irish journalists. It should be noted that the records of the association no longer exist and, oddly, the memoirs of the leading editors and journalists involved in the association – Thomas MacKnight (1896), Andrew Dunlop (1911), Matthias McDonnell Bodkin (1914), John B. Hall (1928), and William O'Brien (1905 and 1920) – make no reference to the association or their involvement in it. Thus, most of the detail that follows is drawn primarily, though not exclusively, from the *Irish Times* as it reported on the association's activities more frequently and in more detail than any other newspaper.

While the dependence on newspaper reports may be considered a limiting factor, the fact that such reports comprise the only surviving account of the activities of the long forgotten Association of Irish Journalists is testament to their utility in uncovering the history of journalistic practice and professional development over the centuries (Bingham, 2010).

### **Journalism in late 1800s Ireland**

From the late 1870s onwards, political developments in Ireland had transformed journalism. The ‘new departure’, whereby constitutional and militant nationalists and agrarian agitators united in a campaign for land reform and home rule, politicised journalism and journalists as never before. As the Land League, led by Michael Davitt and Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell, sought to address the grievances of tenant farmers, the land issue became central to the new political struggle. It also became the centre of journalistic life as League meetings, land sales, evictions, boycotts, crop raids, demonstrations, and attacks on landlords and their agents dominated the work of Irish journalists during the late 1870s and early 1880s. Indeed, one of the first pieces of what would later be termed investigative journalism was published during this campaign. In 1878 Dublin’s *Freeman’s Journal* published William O’Brien’s series ‘Christmas on the Galtees’, which exposed the plight of the rack-rent tenants of the Buckley estate in Co. Tipperary – a series described by Larkin (2014, 39) as ‘a watershed in the history of Irish journalism, perhaps the first instance of the New Journalism in Ireland’. After the introduction of Gladstone’s Land Act of 1881 Parnell turned his attention to home rule, and, although his new organisation, the National League, was concerned primarily with home rule, the land issue remained at the heart of political agitation and journalistic life. As Marie-Louise Legg (1999) has noted, this new unity among the formerly disparate elements of Irish nationalism delivered a huge boost to provincial newspapers, many of which were owned and edited by members or supporters of Parnell’s Irish Parliamentary Party. Recent scholarship (Dungan 2014; Larkin 2013) has detailed the strong relationship that existed between the burgeoning provincial press and the Irish Parliamentary Party – a relationship that tilted the balance of political and journalistic power towards the nationalist movement. The expanding provincial press spread the news of agrarian meetings and protests and played a central role in the development of political consciousness among the farming and labouring classes. This phenomenon was summed up by one reporter (McCarty 1912, 129) when he noted that:

Print had become for the first time an actuality for the catholic peasants and part of their everyday life, speaking to them in a thrilling, palpitating language, intelligible – and there lay the marvel – yet different from anything previously known, for it enabled them to hear their friends at a distance talking to them in accents of power about the wondrous doings of the Land League.

In 1886 the National League’s ‘plan of campaign’ devised by William O’Brien and vigorously promoted by his radical newspaper, *United Ireland*, increased the tempo and tenor of the land campaign by advocating a new round of rent non-payment and boycotting. As evictions began, the League responded with mass demonstrations and pledges by farmers not to take land that became available through eviction. Amid this political agitation, the divide between nationalist and unionist

national newspapers on the issue of home rule became solidified. At this time the spectrum of nationalist opinion was represented by the moderate *Freeman's Journal*, the strongly nationalist *Nation*, and the radical and oft-suppressed *United Ireland*. The spectrum of unionist opinion was represented by the liberal unionist *Irish Times*, the conservative unionist *Daily Express*, and the conservative *Evening Mail*. As Larkin (2012, 27) has noted, newspapers in nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland 'tended to be unashamedly partisan, promoting the causes they espoused in reportage as well as in the editorial columns'. Depending on which newspaper they represented, journalists were either welcomed or ostracised at the meetings and demonstrations that formed the core of the campaign for land reform. At such events – as strangers to the locality – journalists often ran the risk of being mistaken for government officials or bailiffs, of being singled out and condemned for writing for the wrong (usually unionist) newspaper, or in extreme cases, being injured in the disturbances that occasionally erupted.

In the major journalistic memoir of the period, *Fifty years of Irish Journalism* (1911), Andrew Dunlop, a Scotsman who worked for the unionist Dublin *Daily Express*, gives an incisive account of what day-to-day journalism was like in the 1880s. He also provides a telling insight into the divisions along nationalist and unionist lines that characterised journalism and journalists at the time. As well as working for the *Daily Express*, Dunlop was also the Irish correspondent of the London *Daily News*, a position that earned him hostility from nationalist leaders as that newspaper was, in Dunlop's own words, 'strongly opposed to home rule' (Dunlop 1911, 76). In 1880 Dunlop joined the staff of the nationalist *Freeman's Journal*, where, among his colleagues were the later nationalist MP and editor of the radical *United Ireland* William O'Brien. While at the *Freeman*, Dunlop continued to write for the unionist *Daily News*, a situation in which he found nothing odd as he believed that while it was known that his political views 'were not those of the conductors [editors] of the *Freeman's Journal*' it was equally known that they could depend on him 'giving fair and impartial reports' (1911, 46).

Others, however, felt differently, and at League meetings Dunlop found himself being 'vigorously denounced by leading speakers'. In his view, such enmity arose because he 'did not conceal the truth as to what was going on in Ireland during the terrible years from 1878 to 1886' (1911, 76-7). The manner in which Dunlop's reportage was used in court cases only made matters worse. In 1882 Tim Healy, MP, made a speech at a League meeting in Co. Carlow. At the meeting Dunlop was asked by a police constable as to which newspaper he represented. Subsequently, both Healy and Michael Davitt were prosecuted for making seditious speeches. Assigned to cover the court case, Dunlop was astonished to find that the main evidence against the men was the constable's evidence and his (Dunlop's) report of the meeting. The constable declared that he had been present at the meeting, had asked a reporter what newspaper he represented, had heard Healy deliver his speech and the report of the speech in the paper, which he presented to the court as evidence, was correct. Having been found guilty Healy and Davitt were sentenced to three months' imprisonment. It was, Dunlop noted, 'a novel method of proving the accuracy of the report of a speech' (1911, 122-3 and *Irish Times*, January 17, 1883). It was also a novel way of securing a conviction, and afterwards, Dunlop's dual position at the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Daily News* and his presence at League meetings became major bones of contention.

According to Dunlop, towards the end of 1884 successful pressure from the nationalist party was brought to bear on the proprietors of the *Freeman* that he be let go (1911, 250-1). For its part, William O'Brien's *United Ireland* did not mince its

words. In January 1884 it declared that the Irish public would ‘sooner or later have to bestir themselves to stamp out the lying brood of correspondents who live upon the infamous traffic with the English news-agencies and the London papers’ (*United Ireland*, January 12, 1884). Dunlop subsequently secured a position at the unionist *Irish Times*, but his presence at nationalist meetings in his capacity as Irish correspondent of the *Daily News* continued to cause acrimony. At a League meeting in Sligo in 1886, William O’Brien – by now an MP, objected to Dunlop’s presence and declared that ‘none but members of the League’ could be admitted. With no other journalist showing any sign of solidarity, Dunlop had no option but to leave the meeting (Dunlop 1911, 158). Shortly afterwards, Dunlop and O’Brien again clashed at a League meeting at Luggacurran, Co. Laois. Having finished his speech O’Brien turned to Dunlop and asked him to leave the meeting. When Dunlop enquired as to why he should leave, O’Brien replied ‘Because you are not here as an ordinary newspaper reporter, but as a spy’. After rejecting this claim Dunlop left the meeting, but having mounted his horse drawn carriage found it surrounded by an angry crowd that upended it and forced onto the ground. When O’Brien repeated his claim Dunlop retorted ‘It’s a lie and you know it’. According to Dunlop’s account, O’Brien then had to be restrained by several clergymen while Dunlop left the meeting under police protection. Having been walked to the next town, Dunlop encountered a mob waiting for him and was assaulted several times before reaching the post office where he took refuge until the local police sergeant arrived to escort him to the railway station (1911, 167-9). The fact that Dunlop was a leading figure in the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, the aim of which was oppose home rule, made him a person of note to nationalists. The Union’s publication, *Notes from Ireland*, portrayed the home rule party as a separatist movement and highlighted the excesses of the League’s policy of boycotting. In his memoirs Dunlop noted that he was the author of five of the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union’s anti-home rule pamphlets (1911, 121). There is no doubt that any enmity that existed was fuelled by O’Brien’s dislike of Dunlop rather than any journalistic vendetta against Dunlop. On other occasions, particularly when Parnell was present, no such trouble occurred. Indeed, in his memoirs, Dunlop remembers Parnell ‘being always civil and courteous to journalists’ and records how at one meeting, when a minor player in the home rule movement looked like he was about to insist that Dunlop leave a meeting, his journalistic colleagues reassured him that should that happen, they too would leave (1911, 30 and 39).

### **The Association of Irish Journalists**

It was amid such rancour in political and journalistic circles that in February 1887 over 100 journalists from all parts of Ireland, and ‘representing all shades of political opinion’, convened in Dublin. They met to decide whether they should establish an Irish branch of the National Association of Journalists of Great Britain (which had been established in 1884 with the aim of ‘uniting and organising the profession of journalism’) or whether they should form their own independent organisation (*Irish Times*, February 7, 1887). Given the tension that Ireland’s constitutional position caused among some journalists and the partisan nature of the newspaper industry, any attempt to unite the journalists of Ireland in the spirit of professional solidarity was a brave undertaking. Despite these challenges, a provisional committee, chaired by *Irish Times* editor, James A. Scott, had been established in 1886 to investigate the options. This committee had made contact with the National Association in London and discovered that the rules of that association had still to be drawn up. While the committee was ‘almost unanimously in favour of

affiliation' it was also 'deeply impressed with the necessity of forming an Irish Association of Journalists'. Ultimately, it agreed on this latter option (*Irish Times*, September 13, 1886).

The February 1887 meeting brought together the great and the good of Irish journalism. Among the many proprietors and editors present were, James A. Scott of the *Irish Times*, Edward Byrne of the *Freeman's Journal*, Thomas Cleary of the *Clare Independent*, Frederick Potter of the *Skibbereen Eagle*, Arthur Malley of the *Sligo Independent*, Edmund Walsh of the *Wexford Standard*, Thomas Crosbie of the *Cork Examiner*, and William Copeland Trimble of the *Impartial Reporter* (Enniskillen). Among the senior journalists present were Thomas A. Stodart (*Irish Times*), John Wyse Power (*Freeman's Journal*), John B. Hall (*Freeman's Journal*) and Andrew Dunlop (*Irish Times*), the latter two men being the authors of the most prominent Irish journalistic memoirs of the period.

Addressing the meeting, James A. Scott reported that, according to the London based organisation, Irish journalists could not form one Irish branch: they would have to form individual city or district branches instead. On the matter of finance, twenty per cent of Irish subscriptions could be retained for use by local branches. A letter from the secretary of the National Association that was read to the meeting appealed to Irish journalists to join forces with the Association; if they stood apart, it contended, 'they might strike a fatal blow to the cause of journalism'. To encourage unity the Association sent a telegram to the meeting offering an increase in the percentage of subscriptions (from twenty to fifty per cent) that could be retained in Ireland for local use.

Despite such inducements, the provisional committee had concluded that Irish journalists should establish their own national organisation. Seeking to place journalism above political division in the pursuit of professionalism, that committee's chairman, James A. Scott, contended that although many of the journalists present 'held diverse views according to their convictions' they could still 'work for their mutual welfare in harmony and in united sympathy with the English movement for the elevation and improvement of the status of their profession'. Those assembled agreed and thus was born the Association of Irish Journalists (AIJ), the object of which was to 'incorporate the profession of journalists in Ireland for their mutual advantage [and] to represent the status of the profession and protect its interests'. In a move that mirrored discussions already happening in Britain (Hampton 1999) this inaugural meeting of the AIJ agreed that only working journalists, whose qualifications for membership would be judged by a governing council, would be eligible for membership (*Weekly Irish Times*, February 12, 1887).

James A. Scott was elected as first president of the association, which was run by an executive council composed of representatives from the Dublin, Leinster, Belfast, Ulster, Cork, Munster, and Connaught districts. Scott was joined on this executive council by, amongst others, John B. Hall (*Freeman's Journal*) and Thomas Stodart (*Irish Times*) [Dublin]; Edmund Walsh (*Wexford Standard*) and James Carew MP (*Leinster Leader*) [Leinster]; John McBride and John Hamill [Belfast]; William Roddy (*Derry Journal*), John. C. Orr (*Londonderry Sentinel*) and William Copeland Trimble (*Impartial Reporter*) [Ulster]; Edward Tuohy and John McKay (*Cork Examiner*) and William Ludgate (*Cork Constitution*) [Cork]; Frederick Potter (*Skibbereen Eagle*) and Christopher O'Sullivan (*The Munster News*) [Munster]; and, Luke Hayden MP (*Roscommon Messenger*), Jasper Tully (*Roscommon Herald*) and Patrick McHugh (*Sligo Champion*) [Connaught] (*Irish Times*, May 9 1887).

In his first address to the organisation as its president, Scott noted that before it came into being journalists were:

utterly unknown to each other; they were jealous of each other; they were often looked upon as in antagonism to one another – they were regarded as people who had no recognised positions. The term Bohemian was very frequently applied to them. Now they had got beyond that. They considered themselves entitled to be regarded as a profession as well as other professions (*Irish Times*, September 19, 1887).

One of the first initiatives undertaken by the association was the establishment of a benevolent fund, financed by voluntary subscriptions and donations, which was used to cover members' loss of income through illness or death. Senior *Irish Times* journalist Thomas Stodart was the driving force behind this scheme (*Irish Times*, September 19, 1887). While all this activity was very laudable, the partisanship of nineteenth century Irish journalism meant that attempts to keep the volatile politics of the period out of the AIJ were not always successful. At the association's first AGM in April 1888, Scott noted that while its membership 'comprised gentlemen of very great difference of opinion on many matters', they met as an association simply to advance the interests of journalism. They would, he warned, 'be shattered into many fragments if they did not meet together on the assumption that everything was to be excluded except that which concerned the interests of the profession as a profession' (*Irish Times*, April 23, 1888). Scott made reference to an incident earlier in the year in which two journalists, one from a unionist newspaper and one from a nationalist newspaper, had been injured. The injuries had been sustained at a meeting held to protest against the banning of a Land League meeting that was to have been addressed by Michael Davitt. The meeting concluded without incident until the attendees attempted to leave the building and found it surrounded by a large police and military contingent. The police insisted on taking the names of those present but some of the journalists declined to give their names, offering instead the names of the newspapers they represented. Eventually, a baton charge occurred and two journalists, one from the *Irish Times* and one from the *Freeman's Journal*, were injured (*Irish Times*, April 9, 1888).

Scott concluded that any resolution passed by the AGM concerning this incident should confine itself to expressing regret at the injuries caused to the reporters. The politics surrounding the incident were to be left aside: what mattered were the interests of the journalistic profession. Pressmen had, he maintained, been injured at all sorts of meetings and it was the association's business to 'see that they would protect their interests in every way – not in one place, but in every place – not against men of one opinion, but of men of every opinion – and not against one form of incident, but against every form of incident'. The resolution that was passed thus confined itself to an expression of sympathy to the reporters who had been injured.

But, having survived this wobble by a masterful display of diplomacy, the association then elected one of Ireland's most divisive journalists and politicians as its incoming president. William O'Brien, MP, agrarian agitator and former editor of the radical *United Irishman* was an odd choice of president for an association that was at pains to stress its non-political nature (*Irish Times*, April 23, 1888). However, his election was an indication that, as on the island as a whole, nationalist journalists constituted the association's majority membership – a fact that the *Freeman's Journal* sought to downplay in its coverage of O'Brien's inaugural address to the association.

It noted that the association was ‘essentially non-political [and] all differences that are merely political or party are sunk and the Protestant Tory who was President last year is succeeded this year by a Catholic Nationalist’ (June 5, 1888). The chief characteristic of the association was, it noted, ‘to keep political considerations apart in the anxiety to promote purely professional purposes . . . in the common cause of journalistic brotherhood’ (June 12, 1888). In his inaugural address O’Brien declared that when asked to be president he was greatly delighted but ‘also terrified for the Association’ which he recognised was ‘a non-political organisation, which required a good deal of delicate handling in its tender years’. On the issue of journalism and professionalism O’Brien declared that society would ‘have to do something to recognise that a profession it is, and a learned profession it ought to be – a profession of more potency in human affairs even than the noble profession of medicine or the law’. Noting that a journalist ‘need have no diploma but a quill pen to plead causes involving the life of nations’, and that ‘alone among the great occupations of life, the newspaper craft remains practically without laws, tests, or boundaries’, O’Brien concluded that journalism would eventually have to ‘submit to the restraints, and will have to receive the advantages, of a regularised profession’ (*Irish Times*, June 16, 1888). There was, however, no discussion about how the benefits of professionalism were to be achieved by the AIJ.

In October 1888 the association, membership of which now stood at 130 members, held a meeting in Belfast to consider whether it should co-operate with the London based National Association of Journalists in applying for a royal charter for the profession of journalism in the United Kingdom. The AIJ’s vice-president, John McBride, was at pains to point out that while some members believed that the association was to be ‘a sort of trades union’, it really existed to put journalism ‘on a recognised equality with other professions’. The attainment of a royal charter and the establishment of a chartered institute for journalists were, he maintained, crucial to that task. While a charter would not prevent any person from working as a journalist, it would allow for the establishment of examining bodies that would apply certain educational and practical tests to persons seeking to become members of the institute. Those who passed these tests would be given a qualification, and, McBride declared, when selecting staff, newspaper proprietors would choose ‘such men as had this stamp of qualification’. The meeting agreed to co-operate with the London Association in its efforts to establish a chartered institute of journalists (*Irish Times*, October 8, 1888 and January 12, 1889).

However, not everyone was happy with this outcome. The subsequent edition of *United Ireland* noted that the meeting’s attendance ‘was by no means commensurate with the character of the business to be transacted’ and that only six members from outside Ulster had been able to attend. There was, it noted, ‘evidence in hurry of preparation’ of the meeting and many journalists ‘had made other arrangements which prevented them from enjoying the hospitality of their Belfast brethren’ (*United Ireland*, October 13, 1888). It was the first sign of the strong differences in opinion that would ultimately split the association.

### **The AIJ splits**

In January 1889 the AIJ’s various districts met simultaneously to discuss the association’s position in relation to the endeavours of the National Association of Journalists to establish a chartered institute. Having examined the issue, the AIJ’s executive council had put forward three options for its members’ consideration. The

AIJ could seek to become a district of the National Association, adopt its name and share its charter; it could join with certain concessions, such as greater control of its own finances and larger representation on the central authority; or it could continue on its own path and join the movement for a charter at a later stage. The joint meeting of the Dublin, Leinster and Connacht districts expressed support for the idea of a charter, expressed caution in terms of amalgamation and empowered the council to give funds to the National Association to help finance the charter campaign. The Munster district's meeting expressed support for a merger but only 'upon such terms and conditions as would secure for the Irish body proper and fair control of its local administration'. Only the Ulster district gave a definite response; its meeting declared that the AIJ 'should amalgamate with the National Association of Journalists on the formation of the proposed institute' (*Irish Times*, January 12, 1889).

But before the executive committee could initiate any such links the AIJ split amid allegations of members involving the association in politics. In late January 1889 a Limerick reporter, William Reeves of the *Munster News*, was called as a witness in a case against a nationalist MP, Pierce Mahony, who had advised tenants not to pay rent to the receiver of a Limerick estate. Mahony's speech had been reported in the *Cork Herald*, *Cork Examiner* and *Munster News* and when asked to repeat to the court what he had heard Mahony saying, Reeves stated that he 'had a very decided objection to give evidence' and so was committed to prison for contempt of court (*Weekly Irish Times*, January 19, 1899).

At a local (non-AIJ) meeting of journalists in Cork, journalists of both nationalist and unionist persuasions passed a resolution protesting against Reeves' imprisonment for 'refusing to commit a breach of professional honour' (*Irish Times*, February 14, 1889). At an AIJ meeting in Dublin convened to discuss Reeves' imprisonment, a division arose as to the wording of any resolution that might be adopted. The original motion declared that Reeves 'ought not to have been called upon to testify in public court against his wish concerning public proceedings to which he was admitted only in his professional capacity as representing a newspaper', questioned the legality of his imprisonment, and authorised the association to begin proceedings to seek his immediate release. This resolution proved too strong for some members who proposed a more moderate motion that expressed regret that the judge was 'compelled in the exercise of his judicial discretion' to imprison Reeves. This amendment was roundly defeated by twenty-four votes to six. A second amendment, to omit the section that questioned the legality of Reeves' imprisonment was similarly defeated and the original motion was passed (*Irish Times*, February 25, 1889).

Co-incidentally, and fatally for the association, its president, William O'Brien, had also been recently imprisoned for advocating that farmers not rent land that had become available through evictions. After he had refused to wear prison clothes O'Brien had been forcibly stripped and left naked in his cell (*Irish Times*, February 2, 1889). Thus, at the association's meeting, Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, O'Brien's successor as editor of *United Ireland*, proposed a motion that the association express its 'earnest sympathy' with O'Brien, and its regret that 'he should have been subjected to any personal ill-usage'. As the *Irish Times* diplomatically put it, 'a warm discussion arose'.

Several members, including Thomas Stodart of the *Irish Times*, objected to the motion on the grounds that the meeting had been called for a specific purpose (Reeves' imprisonment) and so was not competent to consider any other business. Others protested on the grounds that the motion 'was of a political character' and was 'a breach of faith and professional honesty'. Many of those who argued against the

legitimacy of the motion indicated their intention to withdraw from the association if the motion was persisted with. [It is interesting to note that a similar motion relating to the imprisonment of T.D. Sullivan, editor of the *Nation*, had been debated at a meeting of the National Association of Journalists of Great Britain in December 1887, but had been withdrawn to ensure the survival of the association (*Irish Times*, December 19, 1887)]. However, the meeting's chairman, John B. Hall, ruled that the proposal was in order. McDonnell Bodkin rejected a suggestion that he withdraw the motion and present it at the association's forthcoming AGM, although he did amend it to read 'That the meeting cannot separate without expressing its earnest sympathy with our president, Mr O'Brien, in his imprisonment'. This motion was passed by twenty-three vote to seven and the reaction was immediate (*Irish Times*, February 25, 1889).

As news of the motion spread, several Ulster members resigned from the AIJ and declared their intention to form a branch of the London based National Association of Journalists. The Belfast *Northern Whig*, edited by AIJ member and anti-home rule advocate Thomas MacKnight, was scathing in its criticism. It noted that the Ulster members had given the AIJ all the assistance it could, aware though they were that a number of members did not share their political views. Southern journalists, it declared, were not 'satisfied with equality':

They wish to dictate, just as an Irish Nationalist majority in a Dublin parliament would do. By acting in such a spirit the majority strike a fatal blow at the association. Its unity, and therefore its existence as an Irish Journalists' Association of a non-political character, is destroyed (*Irish Times*, February 26, 1889).

On the other side of the political fence, the reaction of Matthias McDonnell Bodkin and *United Ireland* was equally scathing of those who resigned from the AIJ:

There is a small knot of Dublin journalists and reporters who seem wanting in self-respect. To them the liberties of the Press and the rights of the reporter are secondary matters as compared with the awful solemnity of a judge's dictum. An amendment prostrating the Association, so to speak, before the feet of Judge Boyd, was proposed by Mr D.F. Hannigan, B.L., a gentleman of very unintelligible views, and was supported by the Tory and Unionist minority. We have not words to characterise this sort of subserviency [sic]. Worse than this is the attitude of the same minority in opposing – opposing with all the rancour and heat which they could safely display – a vote of sympathy with Mr William O'Brien, MP, in his imprisonment and sufferings. Mr O'Brien is President of the Association for the present year, duly elected . . . Two of these gentlemen went so far as to threaten withdrawal from the association if the resolution concerning Mr O'Brien's treatment were pressed. Their presence is not desirable after such an exhibition. The Association is not likely to suffer from the deprivation of members who appear to have no sense of professional dignity (*United Ireland*, March 2, 1889).

Among the Dublin members who resigned from the AIJ were James A. Scott, Thomas Stodart, and Andrew Dunlop. Shortly afterwards they sought to ally themselves to the newly established Institute of Journalists (formerly the National Association of Journalists, which changed its name to the Institute of Journalists as it

pursued a royal charter), which, coincidentally, was established around the time, March 1889, that the AIJ was splitting along political lines.

At the Institute's inaugural meeting in London, Andrew Dunlop represented the Dublin journalists who had resigned from the AIJ and explained that their tentative Dublin District of the Institute had been formed as a 'result of the introduction of political subjects into the Irish Journalists' Association [the AIJ] – a step which had eventuated in the breaking up, or, at all events, in the splitting up of that institution' (*Irish Times*, March 11, 1889). Although Dunlop received a sympathetic hearing, the Institute refused to admit him or his colleagues into membership as it did not want 'to act in a hostile manner to the Irish association, which the seceding journalists claim is practically a political body of nationalists' (*Irish Times*, September 16, 1889).

In all, thirty-two journalists resigned over the O'Brien motion. Despite this, the AIJ's annual general meeting went ahead at the end of April 1889, at which Thomas Crosbie, proprietor of the *Cork Examiner*, was elected president (*Freeman's Journal*, 27 April, 1889). For his part, Crosbie had no issue with the O'Brien motion, which was, he declared, 'one of the most natural that could be suggested – it was a resolution of sympathy with the then president of the society, who never in his journalistic career made a distinction of creed or politics'. But he did regret that those who disagreed with the motion had 'thought it necessary to carry their opposition . . . to the extreme of absolutely seceding from the society'. Describing their action as 'hasty and ill-considered' he hoped that with some 'judicious interposition' they might realise that they were wrong in their belief that 'the majority should not be allowed to express an opinion upon a subject which, undoubtedly, concerned journalism in the most intimate manner' (*Cork Examiner*, April 29, 1889).

Discussions between the AIJ and the Institute about how best to cooperate continued and in August 1889 the Institute sent the AIJ the petition for a charter that it was collecting to place before the Privy Council. The petition was signed by the AIJ's council and its ordinary members; roughly 125 signatures were collected in total (*Freeman's Journal*, August 12 and October 7, 1889). This cooperation did not sit well with those who had resigned from the AIJ and unsuccessfully tried to join the Institute. In September 1889, having been refused membership of the Institute, these Dublin journalists lodged an unsuccessful petition with the Privy Council requesting that a charter not be granted to the Institute until they had been admitted as members (*Irish Times*, September 16, 1889).

At the AIJ's half-yearly meeting in October 1889, Thomas Crosbie offered an olive branch to these dissidents. The meeting adopted a resolution that declared that the AIJ was 'a purely journalistic body, having nothing whatever political in its constitution or its objects'. But, while those who had resigned may have been happy to be simply a district of the Institute, the AIJ viewed matters differently. Crosbie declared that while the AIJ supported the idea of a royal charter it would not accept that 'the Irish Association should be a mere appendage of the English Institution'. Its membership, he asserted, was of the view that it 'should not be regarded as merely tributary to the English institution, but should be held to be an independent association, acting for common purposes and common interests'.

In his contribution, Edward Byrne, editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, spoke of the attempts at reconciliation that had been made with those who had resigned. Unofficial communication had been established and both sides had held a meeting with a view to mending relations. The outcome of these discussions had been the resolution stressing the apolitical nature of the association. However, the AIJ's

council had subsequently discovered that the dissidents had mandated one of their negotiators to represent them at the Institute's forthcoming inaugural AGM to again press their right to establish a district of the Institute in Dublin. The meeting thus mandated Crosbie, the AIJ secretary, John B. Hall and Edward Byrne to attend the Institute's meeting to resist these moves. When the debate was opened to the floor, Andrew Dunlop's name cropped up; one member declared that Dunlop had 'showed far greater activity as a seceder [sic] than ever he had shown as a member of the association'. Another member, John Wyse Power, declared that 'the question with regard to the seceding faction, the principle upon which they differed was whether the majority or the minority should rule' (*Irish Times*, October 19, 1889).

At the Institute's AMG in Manchester later that month both sides of the AIJ split were represented. Thomas Crosbie, John B. Hall and Edward Byrne represented the AIJ and Thomas Stodart from the *Irish Times* represented those who had resigned. It was the AIJ deputation that was successful; it received an assurance from the Institute that no Irish District would be admitted to the Institute pending a special meeting to consider the status of Irish journalists (*Freeman's Journal*, October 14, 1889). Later that month the AIJ again attempted to mend relations with its dissenters. A meeting of its executive council passed a motion reiterating the resolution adopted at its half-yearly meeting that had proclaimed the AIJ as an apolitical body. It also agreed to recommend to the association's next AGM that it adopt a rule 'excluding all religious and political questions from the consideration of the association' (*Irish Times*, October 30, 1889). Some days later the dissidents met to consider their response. They declared that while they accepted the resolutions as 'a substantial recognition of the justice of the course taken by those who were compelled on principle to leave the association', the resolutions did not go far enough as they did not 'express regret for passing a resolution which was the cause of the secession' (*Irish Times*, November 2, 1889). It was clear that, by now, a cohort of Irish journalists saw their future best represented by Institute of Journalists.

### **The Institute of Journalists**

In early February 1890, shortly after the Institute of Journalists had been granted a royal charter, a special meeting of its executive council was convened to consider its relationship with Irish journalists. Two deputations from Ireland again attended. Thomas Stodart represented fifty-two Irish journalists from Dublin and Belfast who wished to join the Institute, while a deputation from the AIJ also attended to submit a proposal for co-operation with the Institute. This proposal, that the AIJ join the Institute as an affiliated body and be allowed to retain its own title, was rejected as being incompatible with the Institute's constitution. Ultimately, the Institute decided to 'admit all duly qualified journalists resident in Ireland . . . leaving them to take such action in regard to the organisation of Irish journalists as is open to them under the constitution of the Institute'. The journalists who had resigned from the AIJ were then admitted as members of the Institute and the formation of the Dublin and Ulster districts of the Institute immediately followed (*Irish Times*, February 10, 1890).

The Dublin district was chaired by George Patton (editor, *Daily Express*), its vice-chairman was James A. Scott (editor, *Irish Times*), and both Thomas Stodart and Andrew Dunlop sat on its committee (*Irish Times*, February 22, 1889). Its 1890 AGM noted that it had fifty-seven members with its membership drawn primarily from the *Irish Times*, *Daily Express*, *Dublin Evening Echo* and *Evening Mail*. However, it also

attracted several members from the *Freeman's Journal* (*Irish Times*, August 25, 1890). By 1892 the Dublin District had sixty members, including two ladies, ten associates, and four pupil associates (*Irish Times*, July 25, 1892). The Ulster District was chaired by Thomas McKnight (editor, *Northern Whig*) and contained members representing the *Belfast Newsletter*, *Ulster Echo*, *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, and the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph* (*Irish Times*, February 24, 1890).

Following the Institute's decision to admit Irish members, the AIJ held a special meeting in late February 1890 to review its options and adopted a delicately balanced solution to the position it found itself in. It resolved to maintain the association on 'a professional, benevolent, and social basis' and declared that while it desired to see all journalists enjoy the status and other benefits that a royal charter bestowed, such benefits would not induce them to 'dismember or destroy' the AIJ. So, by retaining its name and possessing the executive powers that came with being an Institute district, it resolved to become a district of the Institute (*Freeman's Journal*, February 24, 1890). Thus was born the Irish Association district. Describing itself as 'the parent district' in Ireland, it had 113 members, which gave it the distinction of being the largest district with the exception of London. Its first chairman was Thomas Crosbie and among its proprietor/editor members were Edward Byrne (editor, *Freeman's Journal*), Edward Walsh (editor, *Wexford People*), Patrick McHugh (editor, *Sligo Champion*), Jasper Tully (editor, *Roscommon Herald*), William O'Brien, MP, (*United Ireland*), Edward Harrington (editor, *Kerry Sentinel*), William Roddy (editor, *Derry Journal*) and Luke Hayden, (editor, *Roscommon Messenger*). Among the senior journalists in its ranks were Jas Poole Maunsell, *Daily Express*, Edward Tuohy, *Cork Examiner*, John Hooper, *Cork Herald*, Pat J. Kelly, *Morning News Belfast*, John Gordon Hill, *Irish Times*, Thomas O'Moore, *Evening Telegraph*, Henry O'Connor, *Leinster Leader*, James O'Connor, *United Ireland*, John Muldoon, *Galway Vindicator*, and Charles Ryan, John B. Hall, John Lenihan, and John Wyse Power, all of the *Freeman's Journal* (*Freeman's Journal*, April 26 and April 28 1890). In 1891 the District had 126 members and Edward Byrne was elected chairman. Joining him on the committee were John B. Hall, John G. Hill, Thomas Crosbie, Edmund Dwyer Grey (proprietor, *Freeman's Journal*) and the man whose motion had split the AIJ, Matthias McDonnell Bodkin (*Irish Times*, April 13, 1891).

Although the Irish districts were distinct in terms of their politics (the Dublin and Ulster districts were unionist and the Irish Association district was nationalist), they were now all part of one journalistic organisation striving for the recognition of journalism as a profession. But no sooner had the Institute of Journalists distributed its rule book than another dispute erupted. In its 'Grey Book', geographical definitions of each district's jurisdiction had been provided. While both the Ulster and Dublin districts were confined to admitting members from their own geographical areas, the Irish Association district could admit members from any part of Ireland. This situation did not sit well with unionist journalists outside of Ulster and Dublin as the Irish Association district was almost exclusively nationalist in character.

In July 1890 the Dublin district agreed to put forward a motion at the Institute's AGM requesting the deletion of these area definitions so as to allow journalists to freely decide which district they wished to join (*Irish Times*, July 26, 1890). A meeting of the Irish Association district resolved to 'strenuously oppose the motion . . . as such change would involve a violation of the conditions under which the AIJ joined the Institute' (*Freeman's Journal*, August 14, 1890). Given the delicacy of the issue, the motion was not voted on at the Institute's AGM but was instead referred to the Institute's council for deliberation (*Irish Times*, September 27,

1890). The council ultimately decided to drop the geographical restrictions (*Irish Times*, January 12, 1891).

There ended, more by stealth than by design, the political divisions that had marred attempts by Irish journalists to coalesce in professional solidarity. As the Institute found its feet, the leading members of the Dublin and Irish Association districts played key roles in its development. At the Institute's 1890 AGM both Thomas Crosbie and James A. Scott (both former presidents of the AIJ) were elected as vice-presidents of the Institute (*Irish Times*, September 29 1890). Crosbie served as Institute president between 1894 and 1895, while Andrew Dunlop, Thomas Stodart, and John B. Hall served, at various times, as vice-presidents. The decision by the Dublin and Irish Association districts to jointly invite the Institute to hold its 1891 annual conference in Dublin resulted in both districts appointing a joint committee to organise the conference (*Irish Times*, December 10, 1890). In 1903, amid the mitigation of the land issue by various land reform acts, both districts amalgamated as the Dublin and Irish Association district and in 1906 Dublin again hosted the Institute's annual conference (*Irish Times*, December 11, 1903). From then on, the Institute represented the interests of Irish journalists until in 1907, as in Britain, disaffection arose about the Institute's emphasis on professional status to the neglect of employment conditions, and the National Union of Journalists emerged as a rival representative organisation.

### **Conclusion**

This article has explored the emergence of professionalism among journalists in Ireland. While the debate on professionalism occurred around the same time as similar debate was taking place in Britain (and was undoubtedly influenced by same), local conditions in Ireland ensured that the moves towards a unified representative organisation and professional status were more fraught than in Britain. Such local conditions – the demands for home rule and land reform, the strong links between the Irish Parliamentary Party and the provincial press, the partisan nature of the press, the political beliefs of journalists, and the dangers attached to the practice of journalism in terms of reporting agrarian agitation – ensured that attempts to unite journalists of strongly diverging political views were unsuccessful in terms of surmounting the unionist – nationalist divide that characterised Irish society and Irish journalism of the time. It was only when the constitutional question and the issue of land reform moved down the political agenda that the moves towards professionalism again took on a cohesive front via the Institute of Journalists, which united Irish journalists in the quest for professional status for over two decades. From 1891 onwards the trajectory of journalistic representation in Ireland mirrored that of Britain in that the Institute sought to represent the often diverging interests of proprietors and journalists. And, just as the professional status versus employment conditions debate eventually led to the establishment of the National Union of Journalists in 1907, so too in Ireland did the NUJ ultimately emerge as the predominant organisation in terms of representing journalists in terms of professional norms and employment conditions.

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