

Jimmy Gralton

(1886-1945)

**Deported for
Political
Offences**



*Jimmy Gralton. The last photo
taken of him — c.1944.*

JIMMY GRALTON was born at Effernagh, near Gowel, Co. Leitrim. He was the only Irishman ever to be deported from Ireland for political offences. The story of his life is one filled with many ironies, not least being that "as an undesirable alien" he was deported from Ireland by a Government headed by Mr. de Valera, even though Mr. de Valera himself had survived in 1916 only because he had claimed American citizenship.

Emigration

At the time of his birth, social and economic conditions in the Gowel area were truly desperate. Numerous evictions on local estates were accompanied by famine. Seasonal migration to Scotland was necessary to pay the rent. It was too easy for the big ranchers to encourage the "grabber" to move in when a tenant "went down on the rent". Tenants fought for the scraps that fell from the landlord's table while a number of them joined the Land League and Parnell so that, together, they could loose the greedy grip of the landlord class.

Jimmy went to school to Master Duignan in Kiltoghert. He was an able scholar and a lasting friendship developed between the teacher and pupil.

By Des Guckian

Civil Rights

As soon as he left school he got work in McGann's shop in Carrick-on-Shannon. McGann was a wealthy merchant who treated his staff so poorly that Jimmy's mind was turned to the idea of civil rights and workers' rights forever afterwards. He joined the British Army in Ireland but deserted when ordered to India. He earned a passage to the U.S.A. on a tramp steamer. Soon he joined the American Navy. This likely earned him his U.S. citizenship and when he left the Navy he got work in a factory in New York. Later, he drove a bread-lorry.

In the midst of a massive show of wealth, working conditions in America bordered on slavery. Joe Hill was framed and murdered and James Larkin imprisoned for "criminal anarchy". Gralton helped the Kerryman Mick Quill found the Transport Workers Union of New York. He protested at the jailing of Larkin, joined the James Connolly Club and eventually he became a member of the American Communist Party. At some stage too, he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (the Clann). de Valera visited New York in 1919 and it is said that the two men got to know each other. Gralton's role in raising money for unfortunate fellow workers in New York and for the Republican cause in Ireland, will never be measured, but it is said to have been considerable. He was brutally blunt in what he said, very

articulate and very honest and unselfish in everything he did.

Back Home in Effernagh

He anticipated the Truce with Britain. This allowed him to return without being arrested for desertion. His passport is dated 2 June 1921. He and his sister were home for Bonfire Night. They were home in time for the bonfire dance in Effernagh. He was a tall, lanky, lithe man. He had brought over money for the I.R.A. from New York. People talked when he didn't go to Mass, and it was rumoured that he was a paid agent who had come over with Communist gold.

The Temperance Hall, Gowel, had recently been burned down by the Black and Tans. The young people all supported him when he offered to build a hall on a portion of his father's land. There was plenty of voluntary labour forthcoming but also criticism from some clergy which was brushed aside by Galton. A large hall was soon erected and Galton named it the Pearse and Connolly Hall in honour of the Republican and Socialist leaders of 1916. The hall was opened with a massive crowd present. Dances and concerts were held frequently. The crowds came from far and near. He organised talented locals to give classes in woodwork, music, boxing, dancing, Irish and English. He was given the job of training I.R.A. volunteers in a camp which they had set up near Effernagh. However, he emphasised that learning to shoot and kill was of limited value. He placed a far greater emphasis on turning their minds to the social issues, mobilising public opinion enough to get the backing of the people and on getting young people to stand up and demand a reasonable livelihood through seeking the division of estates.

The committee set up to run the Hall was broadly based and it included different shades of Republicans, farmers and trade unionists. He himself was chairman.

Everything, including money owed for milk supplied at the dances, was discussed in public, and it was only when some committee members yielded to pressure from the priests and drifted away, that Galton began to dominate proceedings. When the Civil War began he took the Republican side.

Galton's Courts

The committee of the hall was called a Direct Action Committee. For over a year previously it had become common practice for court cases to be referred to Sinn Fein Courts, in defiance of Britain. Now British law and order disintegrated completely, and soon cases were being referred for decision to the Court held in Galton's Hall, with Galton presiding.

There was a great backlog of cases. Land "grabbed" up to forty years previously was now being claimed back by former tenants and the court was kept busy adjudicating, adjusting ownership, and deciding compensation. The division of bogs was a real bone of contention.

Up to five hundred people, mostly spectators gathered to hear some of the cases before Galton's court.

In Galton's court, difficult cases were referred to five independent men and their decision was read out. A decision then had to be implemented. Though Galton was often heard to tell one trigger-happy follower to "forget about your god-damned revolver", there was one occasion when he himself showed considerable daring. Years before, a farm near Drumsna had been grabbed from John Egan. Even though the new owner had died the place had gone to his son-in-law. Egan had been forced to emigrate. Galton's court decided Egan should be reinstated. One hundred people headed by Galton and Tommy Gilroy made their way to the farm. The entrance was blocked by Fr. Egan, C.C. Drumsna

and a force of Free State troops. Fr. Egan said that because the son-in-law could not be held responsible for grabbing, no change should be made. Galton informed them of his intention to implement the court's decision. He was warned not to try by the Captain of the troops. Galton and Gilroy drew revolvers and aiming them at the Captain said that he would be dead before themselves if shooting began. They then burst over the hedge, followed by their supporters and talked to the occupier. He readily agreed and the place was handed back legally the next day. John Egan returned to his home.

There were cases where a few mavericks acted unofficially in Galton's name. In one case when a Protestant man was threatened Galton felt this was done deliberately to blacken his own reputation.

Escaped to U.S.A.

Redemptorist Missioners in Gowel in June 1922 undermined Galton's authority. He was re-roofing his father's home in June when the Free State Troops came to arrest him once more. "Hold on a minute, till I change my clothes" he told them. He went into the bedroom, which had the thatch off the back, and escaped. He went to friends in Corlara, Drumsna, and later escaped to the U.S.A.

The Free State troops took over the Hall. As the Civil War came to a close the Republicans were denied work on public works. They were facing starvation. Some emigrated. Galton collected £20 in the U.S.A. and he sent this home to be divided among those with families. Priests did use their influence to get jobs for men. This increased their standing and their power over the community.

de Valera came to power in 1932, supported by seven Labour T.D.'s. de Valera had taken advantage of the support of a loose amalgamation of left-wing



Des Guckian

Gralton had gone on the run in March. In July, a deputation which included his aged mother and locals spoke at a meeting of the Co. Council and a lengthy letter from Gralton himself was read to the meeting, but to no avail. In August he was captured near Gortvagh and deported with haste. His passage was paid for him on "The Britannic", from money found in his possession — the money from a few cattle which were sold for him while he was on the run.

He was interviewed on board the ship. He said he felt "disgusted at being shipped away from my native land in this way, without at least having been given a trial by the Government that I supported in my own small way". He added "My treatment comes ill at the hands of representatives of a people who have been crying against persecution for hundreds of years". He was not allowed to return again. He died in the U.S.A. in December 1945.

Fifty years have gone by since Gralton was deported. Some people do not want to hear talk of Gralton but there are many who, in the light of more recent events, feel that he was before his time and that in breaking the power of landlords he honestly sought civil rights and work, at home, for all.

There is a story of Gralton, in New York, taking pity on a down-and-out man in the streets and bringing him home to his flat. When he awoke in the morning Gralton found that the man had gone and that he had stolen his trousers. In a sense it is the story of his life.

incessantly about "this communist agent and anti-Christ in our midst". In July 1933 Archdeacon Donohue, P.P., Carrick-on-Shannon was to preach as follows: "Communism is the enemy of all religion and subversive of ordered Government".

The Co. Leitrim Board of Health passed a motion condemning Gralton and his followers. In December 1932 Gralton Hall was fired into and bombed and finally the place was soaked in paraffin and burned. An election was held in January 1933 in which Co. Leitrim clergy openly supported de Valera's candidate. Fianna Fail won an outright majority and even before the new government was formed the outgoing Fianna Fail Minister of Justice, Mr. Geoghegan of Longford, was prevailed upon by the clergy to order the deportation of Gralton.

Deported

The Deportation Order was dated Feb. 3, 1933. It ordered Gralton "as an undesirable alien" to leave Ireland before March 5. Gralton used this month to try to organise support. He sought a meeting with the new Minister for Justice but he was refused. He demanded a trial but he got none. Local and national Committees were set up to support him. Gralton was to say later that he sought publicity so that a terrible precedent would not be set by railroading him out of the country on the quiet. In March Peadar O'Donnell came to address an after-Mass meeting in Drumsna but he and those with him were attacked and abused by some locals incited by Fr. Cosgrove. One man who had pasted O'Donnell with mud was accosted by a neighbour who said, "There is a man over there beyond who grabbed your land some years ago. You never had the courage to do that to him yet you attack a man who is here to defend the victim of landlordism".

Republicans, like Peadar O'Donnell, who had opposed the payment of annuities to Britain. Cheered by the change of Government, but also for family reasons, Gralton returned home to Effernagh in 1932. His brother Charles had died in July 1930 and his parents were old and feeble. Though in poor health himself Jimmy threw himself into the farm work with a will. He was a model farmer. Yet the ghosts of years past would not be buried. His father died that year and Fr. O'Dowd C.C. talked of Jimmy as if he expected he would not have the decency to give his father a christian burial. Jimmy surprised everyone by paying substantial offerings.

He was restless at the economic depression, poverty and gross unemployment which filled Ireland. He contacted the Communist Party of Ireland. Against his advice, the Hall was opened again by a group of his young neighbours. This drew a very strong condemnation from the clergy of the entire area. In time, they were successful in discouraging patrons, and numbers attending the Hall declined. Among those who attended functions in the Hall were a few of the Revolutionary Workers Group from Longford.

He had joined the Drumsna Cumann of Fianna Fail. He urged the repair of roads and the cleaning of rivers in order to create employment. He even addressed the Co. Council on the subject. Soon the message came down from Fianna Fail Headquarters that he was to be expelled. The Chairman, Mr. Beirne, Solr., was friendly to him and told him that he was about one hundred years before his time. He left quietly.

"This Communist Agent"

It was hoped that the Eucharistic Congress would help heal the divisions in Ireland, and anyone, like Gralton, who openly admitted to being a Communist could not be tolerated by the Church. Priests preached