

Jimmy's Hall

Presentation by Peter Anderson (from Wikipedia)

Jimmy's Hall is a 2014 British-Irish drama film directed by Ken Loach. The film tells the story of the return in Ireland in 1933 after deportation to the United States of Jimmy Gralton, who led the Revolutionary Workers' Group, a precursor of the Irish Communist Party, in Leitrim. It stars Irish actor Barry Ward, along with Simone Kirby and Jim Norton. The title refers to a rural dance hall built by Gralton to expound his political views. It was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or in the main competition section at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

Reception

Jimmy's Hall garnered generally positive critical reception. Review aggregation website Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a score of 71%. Another review aggregator, Metacritic, assigned the film a weighted average score of 60/100, based on 7 reviews from mainstream critics.

Plot

In 1932, after ten years in the United States, Jimmy Gralton returns to his native Ireland to help his mother run the family farm. A new government is in power in Ireland ten years after the end of the Civil War. To meet the needs of the young people of County Leitrim, Jimmy, in spite of his reluctance to cause upset to his old enemies (the Church and the local landowners), decides to reopen the 'Hall', a young people's centre, free and open to all, where the local young people meet to dance, study or talk. Success comes quickly, but the growing influence of Jimmy and his radical ideas is not to the taste of everyone in the village.

The film centres around political tensions between the Catholic church, the state and the republican movement to which Jimmy through his pre-emigration history is connected. Jimmy's political alignment is central to the film, he suffers for being a free-thinker and committed to the liberation of ordinary people through education and also by having experience from America of Jazz (the rhythms and passions of "darkest Africa" are warned against in one church sermon warning of the perils of The 'Hall'). Jimmy is aligned to communism and encourages participation in the study and dancing that evolve as key activities at the 'Hall'.

The power and hypocrisy of the church is demonised in the film by aligning it to the beating by her father of a free spirited young girl who laughs at the priest while she is named and shamed for attending a dance at the Hall in a church service. The pious religion of Jimmy's mother is also contrasted against her love of learning and ability to explore popular non-religious literature, which has aligned her family to Communism for liberation of working people. It is clear throughout the film that Jimmy and his mother are not aligned to any struggle above and beyond the necessities of their local community; however, this does bring them into involvement with attempting to prevent an eviction of a family who are displaced from their home.

This eviction and the assertive re-instatement of the family along with Jimmy's support and oratory to those gathered at the reinstatement draw him to the attention of the Gardaí. This starts a chain of events which ends in Jimmy's expulsion from Ireland based on the flimsy premise that he holds a US passport and that political agitators have previously been expelled from the country on such grounds. The lack of a fair trial is emphatically explained in the film by a speech given by Jimmy's mother at a rally surrounding the expulsion.

The behaviour of the state's police is shown and explained to be occurring at a time when Stalin was in full control of the Soviet Union and it is obvious that the state and church are fearful of forces that

threaten to destroy them. It is this tension between the ideals of Christianity and the fear of the church and its natural tendency to be reactionary that is the central issue that the film explores.

The Irish Civil War

The **Irish Civil War** (Irish: *Cogadh Cathartha na hÉireann*; 28 June 1922 – 24 May 1923) followed the Irish War of Independence and accompanied the establishment of the Irish Free State, an entity independent from the United Kingdom but within the British Empire.

The conflict was waged between two opposing groups of Irish republicans over the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The forces of the "Provisional Government" (which became the Free State in December 1922) supported the Treaty, while the Republican opposition saw it as a betrayal of the Irish Republic (which had been proclaimed during the Easter Rising). Many of those who fought in the conflict had been members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the War of Independence.

The Civil War was won by the Free State forces, which were heavily armed with weapons provided by the British Government. The conflict may have claimed more lives than the War of Independence that preceded it, and left Irish society divided and embittered for generations. Today, two of the main political parties in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fáil (/fʲiːnə ˈfʲiːl/ Fianna Fáil's name is traditionally translated into English as *Soldiers of Destiny*, although a more accurate rendition would be *Warriors of Fál* "Fál" being a legendary name for Ireland) and Fine Gael (/fiːnə ˈeːl/ meaning *Family* or *Tribe of the Irish*) are direct descendants of the opposing sides in the war.

The treaty and its consequences

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was agreed to end the 1919-1921 Irish War of Independence between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The treaty provided for a self-governing Irish state, having its own army and police. The Treaty also allowed Northern Ireland (the six north-eastern counties – Fermanagh, Antrim, Tyrone, Londonderry, Armagh and Down – where the majority population was of the Protestant religion) to opt out of the new state and return to the United Kingdom – which it did immediately. However, rather than creating the independent republic favoured by most nationalists, the Irish Free State would be an autonomous dominion of the British Empire with the British monarch as head of state, in the same manner as Canada and Australia. The British suggested this dominion in secret correspondence even before treaty negotiations began, but Sinn Féin /ˈsɪn ˈfeɪn/ leader Eamon de Valera /eːmən dɒvəˈlɛrə/ rejected the dominion. The treaty also stipulated that members of the new Irish Oireachtas /ˈoɪrəkʲtəs/ (parliament) would have to take the following "Oath of Allegiance":

"I... do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established, and that I will be faithful to His Majesty King George V, his heirs and successors by law in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of nations."

This oath was highly objectionable to many Irish Republicans. Furthermore, the partition of Ireland, which had already been decided by the Westminster parliament in the Government of Ireland Act 1920, was effectively confirmed in the Anglo-Irish treaty. The most contentious areas of the Treaty for the IRA were the disestablishment of the Irish Republic declared in 1919, the abandonment of the First Dáil, the status of the Irish Free State as a dominion in the British Commonwealth and the British retention of the so-called strategic Treaty Ports on Ireland's south coast which were to remain occupied by the Royal Navy. All these issues were the cause of a split in the IRA and ultimately civil war.

Michael Collins, the republican leader who had led the Irish negotiating team, argued that the treaty gave "not the ultimate freedom that all nations aspire and develop, but the freedom to achieve freedom". However, anti-treaty militants in 1922 believed that the treaty would never deliver full Irish independence.

Split in the Nationalist movement

The split over the treaty was deeply personal. Many of the leaders on both sides had been close friends and comrades during the War of Independence. This made their disagreement over the treaty all the more bitter. Michael Collins later said that Éamon de Valera had sent him as plenipotentiary to negotiate the treaty because he knew that the British would not concede an independent Irish republic and wanted Collins to take the blame for the compromise settlement. He said that he felt deeply betrayed when de Valera refused to stand by the agreement that the plenipotentiaries had negotiated with David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. De Valera, for his part, was furious that Collins and Arthur Griffith had signed the treaty without consulting him or the Irish cabinet as instructed.

Third Tipperary Brigade Flying Column No. 2 under Seán Hogan during the War of Independence. Most of the IRA units in Munster were against the treaty.

Dáil Éireann [/dɑːl ɪəˈrən/](#) (the parliament of the Irish Republic) narrowly passed the Anglo-Irish Treaty by 64 votes to 57 on 7 January 1922. Following the Treaty's ratification, in accordance with article 17 of the Treaty, the British-recognised Provisional Government of the Irish Free State was established. Its authority under the Treaty was to provide a "provisional arrangement for the administration of Southern Ireland during the interval" before the establishment of the Irish Free State. In accordance with the Treaty, the British Government transferred "the powers and machinery requisite for the discharge of its duties". Before the British Government transferred such powers, the members of the Provisional Government each "signified in writing [their] acceptance of [the Treaty]".

Upon the Treaty's ratification, de Valera resigned as President of the Republic and failed to be re-elected by an even closer vote of 60–58. He challenged the right of the Dáil to approve the treaty, saying that its members were breaking their oath to the Irish Republic. De Valera continued to promote a compromise whereby the new Irish Free State would be in "external association" with the British Commonwealth rather than be a member of it (the inclusion of republics within the Commonwealth of Nations was not formally implemented until 1949).

In early March, he formed the "Cumann na Poblachta" (Republican Association) party while remaining a member of Sinn Féin and commenced a speaking tour of the more republican province of Munster on 17 March 1922. During the tour, de Valera made controversial speeches at Carrick on Suir, Lismore, Dungarvan and Waterford, saying at one point, "If the Treaty were accepted, the fight for freedom would still go on, and the Irish people, instead of fighting foreign soldiers, will have to fight the Irish soldiers of an Irish government set up by Irishmen." At Thurles, several days later, he repeated this imagery and added that the IRA "would have to wade through the blood of the soldiers of the Irish Government, and perhaps through that of some members of the Irish Government to get their freedom."

In a letter to the Irish Independent on 23 March, de Valera accepted the accuracy of their report of his comment about "wading" through blood, but deplored that the newspaper had published it.

More seriously, many Irish Republican Army (IRA) officers were also against the treaty, and in March 1922 an ad hoc Army Convention repudiated the authority of the Dáil to accept the treaty. In contrast, the Minister of Defence, Richard Mulcahy, stated in the Dáil on 28 April that conditions in Dublin had prevented a Convention from being held, but that delegates had been selected and voted by ballot to accept the Oath. The anti-Treaty IRA formed their own "Army Executive", which they declared to be the real government of the country, despite the result of the 1921 general election. On 26 April, the Minister of Defence, Richard Mulcahy, summarised alleged illegal activities by many IRA men over the previous

three months, whom he described as 'seceding volunteers', including hundreds of robberies. Yet this fragmenting army was the only police force on the ground following the disintegration of the Irish Republican Police and the disbanding of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).

By putting ten questions to General Mulcahy on 28 April, Seán McEntee argued that the Army Executive had acted continuously on its own to create a republic since 1917, had an unaltered constitution, had never fallen under the control of the Dáil, and that: "*the only body competent to dissolve the Volunteer Executive was a duly convened convention of the Irish Republican Army*" – not the Dáil. By accepting the treaty in January and abandoning the republic, the Dáil majority had effectively deserted the Army Executive. In his reply, Mulcahy rejected this interpretation.^[12] Then, in a debate on defence, McEntee suggested that supporting the Army Executive "... *even if it meant the scrapping of the Treaty and terrible and immediate war with England, would be better than the civil war which we are beginning at present apparently.*" McEntee's supporters added that the many robberies complained of by Mulcahy on 26 April were caused by the lack of payment and provision by the Dáil to the volunteers.

Aftermath of the ceasefire

Éamon de Valera supported the order, issuing a statement to Anti-Treaty fighters on 24 May:

"Soldiers of the Republic. Legion of the Rearguard: The Republic can no longer be defended successfully by your arms. Further sacrifice of life would now be in vain and the continuance of the struggle in arms unwise in the national interest and prejudicial to the future of our cause. Military victory must be allowed to rest for the moment with those who have destroyed the Republic."

Thousands of Anti-Treaty IRA members (including Éamon de Valera on 15 August) were arrested by the Free State forces in the weeks and months after the end of the war, when they had dumped their arms and returned home.

The Free State government had started peace negotiations in early May, which broke down. Without a formal peace, holding 13,000 prisoners and worried that fighting could break out again at any time, it enacted the Emergency Powers Act on 2 July by a vote of 37 – 13.

Shortly following the end of the civil war, a General Election was held, which Cumann na nGaedheal, the pro-Free State party, won with about 40% of the vote. The Republicans, represented by Sinn Féin, won about 27% of the vote. Many of their candidates and supporters were still imprisoned before, during and after the election.

In October 1923, around 8,000 of the 12,000 Republican prisoners in Free State gaols went on a hunger strike. The strike lasted for 41 days and met little success (among those who died were Denny Barry and Andy O'Sullivan). However, most of the women prisoners were released shortly thereafter and the hunger strike helped concentrate the Republican movement on the prisoners and their associated organisations. In July, de Valera had recognised the Republican political interests lay with the prisoners and went so far as to say:

"The whole future of our cause and of the nation depends in my opinion upon the spirit of the prisoners in the camps and in the jails. You are the repositories of the NATIONAL FAITH AND WILL"

Political results

The fact that the Irish Civil War was fought between Irish Nationalist factions meant that the sporadic conflict in Northern Ireland ended. Collins and Sir James Craig signed an agreement to end it on 30 March 1922, but, despite this, Collins covertly supplied arms to the Northern IRA until a week before his death in August 1922. Because of the Irish Civil War, Northern Ireland was able to consolidate its

existence and the partition of Ireland was confirmed for the foreseeable future. The continuing war also confirmed the northern Unionists' existing prejudices against the ethos of all shades of nationalism. This might have led to open hostilities between North and South had the Irish Civil War not broken out. Indeed the Ulster Special Constabulary (the "B-Specials") that had been established in 1920 (on the foundation of Northern Ireland) was expanded in 1922 rather than being demobilised.

In the event, it was only well after their defeat in the Civil War that anti-treaty Irish Republicans seriously considered whether to take armed action against British rule in Northern Ireland (the first serious suggestion to do this came in the late 1930s). The northern units of the IRA largely supported the Free State side in the Civil War because of Collins's policies, and over 500 of them joined the new Free State's National Army.

The cost of the war and the budget deficit it caused was a difficult moment for the new Free State and affected the Boundary Commission negotiations of 1925, which were to determine the border with Northern Ireland. The Free State agreed to waive its claim to predominantly Nationalist areas in Northern Ireland and in return its agreed share of the Imperial debt under the 1921 Treaty was not paid.

In 1926, having failed to persuade the majority of the Anti-Treaty IRA or the anti-treaty party of Sinn Féin to accept the new status quo as a basis for an evolving Republic, a large faction led by de Valera and Aiken left to resume constitutional politics and to found the Fianna Fáil party. Whereas Fianna Fáil was to become the dominant party in Irish politics, Sinn Féin became a small, isolated political party. The IRA, then much more numerous and influential than Sinn Féin, remained associated with Fianna Fáil (though not directly) until banned by de Valera in 1935.

In 1927, Fianna Fáil members took the Oath of Allegiance and entered the Dáil, effectively recognising the legitimacy of the Free State. The Free State was already moving towards independence by this point. Under the Statute of Westminster 1931, the British Parliament gave up its right to legislate for members of the British Commonwealth. When elected to power in 1932, Fianna Fáil under de Valera set about dismantling what they considered to be objectionable features of the treaty, abolishing the Oath of Allegiance, removing the power of the Office of Governor General (British representative in Ireland) and abolishing the Senate, which was dominated by former Unionists and pro-treaty Nationalists. In 1937, they passed a new constitution, which made a President the head of state, did not mention any allegiance to the British monarch, and which included a territorial claim to Northern Ireland. The following year, Britain returned without conditions the seaports that it had kept under the terms of the treaty.^[79] When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the Free State was able to demonstrate its independence by remaining neutral throughout the war, although Dublin did to some extent tacitly support the Allies. Finally, in 1948, a coalition government, containing elements of both sides in the Civil War (pro-treaty Fine Gael and anti-treaty Clann na Poblachta) left the British Commonwealth and renamed the Free State the Republic of Ireland. By the 1950s, the issues over which the Civil War had been fought were largely settled.

Legacy

As with most civil wars, the internecine conflict left a bitter legacy, which continues to influence Irish politics to this day. The two largest political parties in the republic through most of its history (until the 2011 Irish General Election) were Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael /**fiñe ðe**/, the descendants respectively of the anti-treaty and pro-treaty forces of 1922. Until the 1970s, almost all of Ireland's prominent politicians were veterans of the Civil War, a fact which poisoned the relationship between Ireland's two biggest parties. Examples of Civil War veterans include: Republicans Éamon de Valera, Frank Aiken, Todd Andrews, and Seán Lemass; and Free State supporters W. T. Cosgrave, Richard Mulcahy and Kevin O'Higgins. Moreover, many of these men's sons and daughters also became politicians, meaning that the personal wounds of the civil war were felt over three generations. In the 1930s, after Fianna Fáil took power for the first time, it looked possible for a while that the Civil War

might break out again between the IRA and the pro-Free State Blueshirts. Fortunately, this crisis was averted, and by the 1950s violence was no longer prominent in politics in the Republic of Ireland.

However, the breakaway IRA continued (and continues in various forms) to exist. It was not until 1948 that the IRA renounced military attacks on the forces of the southern Irish state when it became the Republic of Ireland. After this point, the organisation dedicated itself primarily to the end of British rule in Northern Ireland. Up until the 1980s, the IRA Army Council still claimed to be the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic declared in 1918 and annulled by the Treaty of 1921.