

# *In the Labor Movement: Gerald O'Reilly and New York City's TWU*

BY OWEN LOOF

In the 1930s and 1940s the Transport Workers Union (TWU) in New York City led the way nationally in effectively fighting for workers' interests. This advancement reversed the legacy of failure attached to earlier union efforts. New Deal policies during these two decades had laid the foundations for changes in every aspect of American life.<sup>1</sup> But there were additional factors that helped the new Transport Workers Union succeed where others had failed.

Among the most important factors were the men who took the lead in organizing the fledging union. Among these was Gerald O'Reilly. O'Reilly was a conductor for the Interboro Rapid Transit (IRT)<sup>2</sup> in 1933 when he first became involved in discussions regarding the formation of an effective union to concentrate on the interests of its members. These discussions would lead to formation of the TWU, the union in which O'Reilly would play important roles, though not top leadership ones, for over thirty-five years.

(While top leaders and rank and filers were critical to the success of the labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s, it was the men at the middle point of union hierarchy who were the

heart and soul of the labor movement. In corporations, middle managers are in direct contact with workers and do the real work in running day-to-day business operations. In labor unions, middle managers serve a double function: as liaisons for workers with top union officials and with management's representatives.

Middle managers in labor do legwork for the workers, the union, and management. This was the position of Gerald O'Reilly who was never a top TWU official. The highest position he held was an elected member of the executive board for Local 100. He did not become a paid official until after World War II when he was appointed as an organizer for the conductors – a responsibility he held with one significant

interruption until his retirement in 1970.<sup>3</sup>)

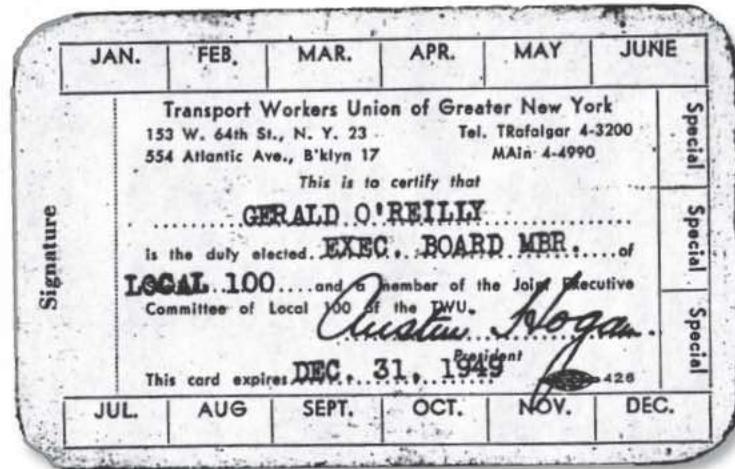
Looking at O'Reilly's life, his guiding principles, and his union activities provides a view of how Irish New York labor leaders were able to address the extreme conditions confronting workers and to overcome barriers to their organizing efforts during the twentieth century. It also shows how leaders' connections to Ireland were significant in their lives and successes. If it can be said that the TWU was emblematic of



*Illustration:*  
Unidentified motor-  
man in train yard  
(probably in  
1930s). Courtesy of  
New York City  
Transit Museum  
Archives.

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newly successful labor organizations more generally, Gerald O'Reilly served the same purpose for the TWU itself. The union brought workers who had previously been denied access to public life into the mainstream of organized reform.<sup>4</sup> Gerald O'Reilly was an important cog in the machine that accomplished this feat and changed the force of politics, economics, and the work and culture of the transit industry.

#### FROM A FARM FAMILY IN MEATH

Gerald O'Reilly was born on May 29, 1903, to a large family that ran a sixty-acre farm near Drogheda in County Meath. He attended a nearby Christian Brothers' school, and was a student at the Agricultural College in Cavan when he joined the First Eastern Division of the Irish Republican Army. He transferred to the Fourth Northern Division during the civil war after Ireland was divided, and was sent to prison for this participation. He was freed when, on August 13, 1922, supporters of his cause captured the military barracks where he was being held.

O'Reilly continued his activity in the cause of a united Ireland after the cease-fire in 1923. He also played a leading role in the successful attempt to release prisoners from Mountjoy Jail in 1925. He was arrested once more, and upon his release he decided to immigrate to America, arriving in New York aboard the liner *Samaria* on November 8, 1927. Settling on Voss Avenue in

Yonkers, New York, O'Reilly obtained his first American job at the Alex Smith Carpet Factory in Yonkers where, he said, "the conditions were terrible."<sup>5</sup>

To improve his situation, O'Reilly looked toward employment with the New York City Interboro Rapid Transit system. (Most of the city's transit workers of this era shared an Irish heritage.) O'Reilly brought with him all his experience in politics and life when he applied at the office of the IRT at 165 Broadway early in 1928. He later reported, "I was told that I must join the union and was given an address on Anderson Avenue. I went over and joined what I found out later was a company union."<sup>6</sup>

While O'Reilly came from a family of farmers and the only real union he ever belonged to was the TWU, by the time he joined the IRT he had developed a good grasp of the concept of industrial unionism through the writings of James Connolly.<sup>7</sup> Connolly was a well-known Irish rebel and socialist theoretician who was also a staunch labor leader and organizer. He was active in politics and unionism on both sides of the Atlantic.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF JAMES CONNOLLY

After his weekly Dublin newspaper *The Worker's Republic* went bust and his Irish Socialist Republican Party split, Connolly was forced to come to America. Joining the Socialist Labor Party led him to a job as organizer for the

*Illustration:*  
O'Reilly's TWU membership card from 1949 identifies him as an elected member of the Local 100's joint executive committee. Courtesy of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

Industrial Workers of the World.

In this capacity (and as the New York correspondent for the party's newspaper), Connolly worked with such diverse groups as the longshoremen in New York harbor and the trolley car workers in Yonkers. In 1910, friends of Connolly in Dublin realized how important he would be in assisting fledgling political and union organizations, and he returned to Ireland as the chief organizer for the Irish Transport Workers Union in Belfast.<sup>8</sup> He was one of the leaders arrested during the Great Strike in Dublin in 1913, and referring to a government proclamation at his trial said that he could not recognize the document because "I do not recognize the English government in Ireland at all. I do not even recognize the King except when compelled to do so"—an eloquent sentiment that was shared and carried on by Irish patriots everywhere.<sup>9</sup> Connolly also served as the Commandant General of the United Dublin Forces during the Easter Rebellion of 1916. He surrendered to the authorities with wounds suffered during battle and was executed the next day.

During his lifetime, Connolly wrote extensively in pamphlets, labor newspapers, and books. Though many Irishmen knew his name, his ideas and proposals were relatively unknown outside of his homeland until small groups of Irish immigrant workers began meeting in small clubs throughout New York City in the early 1930s.<sup>10</sup> O'Reilly credited the memory and spirit of James Connolly for giving the budding TWU members the will to go on during hard times. He stated that "the ultimate and splendid success of the TWU in America is in fact a fitting tribute to his memory."<sup>11</sup> Throughout his career, Gerald O'Reilly continued to pay homage to the memory of James Connolly at annual events in his honor.

#### FACING DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS

O'Reilly brought experience, knowledge and common sense with him when he began work on the IRT. It did not take him long to realize that the working conditions in the subway were bad. In fact, he had expected things to be better than in the carpet factory but conditions in his new situations were "deplorable."<sup>12</sup> Everyone

worked seven days a week. For conductors like O'Reilly, most of the jobs were either extra or split shifts. An extra job meant you had no set assignment but were given the job of someone who was not working that day. A split shift was one in which you worked a few hours, had a certain amount of time off, and finished the shift with a few more hours.<sup>13</sup> Split shift jobs were usually scheduled around the rush hours. O'Reilly stated that, as an extra, he reported to a terminal at either 5AM or 4PM to be on call for three hours. If no job became available there was no work and no pay.<sup>14</sup> The IRT offered no holiday or sick leave, and many men were



*Illustration:*  
 Photograph of Gerald  
 O'Reilly taken in 1939.  
 Courtesy of Robert F.  
 Wagner Labor Archives,  
 Tamiment Library,  
 New York University.

continuing to work into their late sixties and seventies because there were no pensions.

After seventeen months on the extra list O'Reilly finally got a steady run which, he later wrote, meant he reported "at 242nd Street in the Bronx at 6:45AM and finished at New Lots Avenue in Brooklyn at 7:14PM with a swing of four hours."<sup>15</sup> Ticket agents, or "nickel pushers," did not have it much better. This job also meant starting as an extra and waiting between four to seven hours just to see if a job would be available. Most of the time the men were sent home jobless and without pay, and "considered themselves lucky if they worked a few hours two

### BY-LAWS

Sec. 1. Initiation Fee shall be One Dollar.

Dues shall be Fifty Cents per month, payable quarterly in advance. Each member shall pay an Assessment of 50c per year, for the General Committee Fund.

Sec. 2. Dues shall be payable on or before the Local meeting day, in the first month of each quarter, and any member in arrears after the first meeting day in the Quarter, who fails to pay his Dues after being properly notified of his indebtedness to the Local, shall be considered in Bad Standing in the Brotherhood and subject to expulsion from the Local.

Sec. 3. Members who become sick may at the discretion of the Board of Delegates be paid Sick Benefits, at the rate of Ten Dollars per week for Ten Weeks.

A member to receive sick benefits must be sick for fourteen consecutive days when he may receive One Week's benefits, and if his sickness con-

tinues he may receive \$10.00 per week for nine weeks thereafter.

A member to receive sick benefits must notify Secretary Mangan, at Brotherhood Hall, by mail or telephone of his sickness, City Phone Jerome 0633, Company Phone 52, and his sick benefits begin 14 days after the Secretary has been notified.

No member shall receive more than Ten Weeks sick benefits in any one year (52 weeks).

A Doctor's Certificate giving the cause of sickness shall be required in all cases of claims for sick benefits, and all claims shall be investigated by a delegate, and the decision of the Board of Delegates on all cases or claims shall be final.

No Sick Benefits shall be paid to a member less than six months in the Local, and no sick benefits shall be paid in Compensation cases.

No sick benefits shall be paid in cases of sickness or disability arising from venereal diseases, intoxication; or in T. B. or other chronic diseases if a member is less than two years in the Local.

Sec. 4. Any member who re-

or three nights a week."<sup>16</sup> If they got lucky and were assigned a steady job, they worked twelve hours a day for thirty-three cents an hour, seven days a week, "caged in a barred, unventilated, metal booth," sweating in the summer, shivering in the winter, and breathing steel dust all the time.<sup>17</sup>

These were working conditions that had to be changed, and a union was the way to get that task accomplished. There were previous, failed attempts to build a real union in New York City's transit system in 1905, 1910, 1916, and 1926.<sup>18</sup>

#### PINKERTONS, BEAKIES, AND CLAN NA GAEL

These attempts to organize were usually stopped by infiltration into organizing groups of anti-union Pinkerton agents. In addition to these agents there were other types of company spies inside the IRT who were called "beakies." The name was derived from H.L. Beakie, the man who headed the company security force. Many beakies were outside people, but there were also workers who were paid one dollar a day on top

of their regular salary to spy on fellow workers.

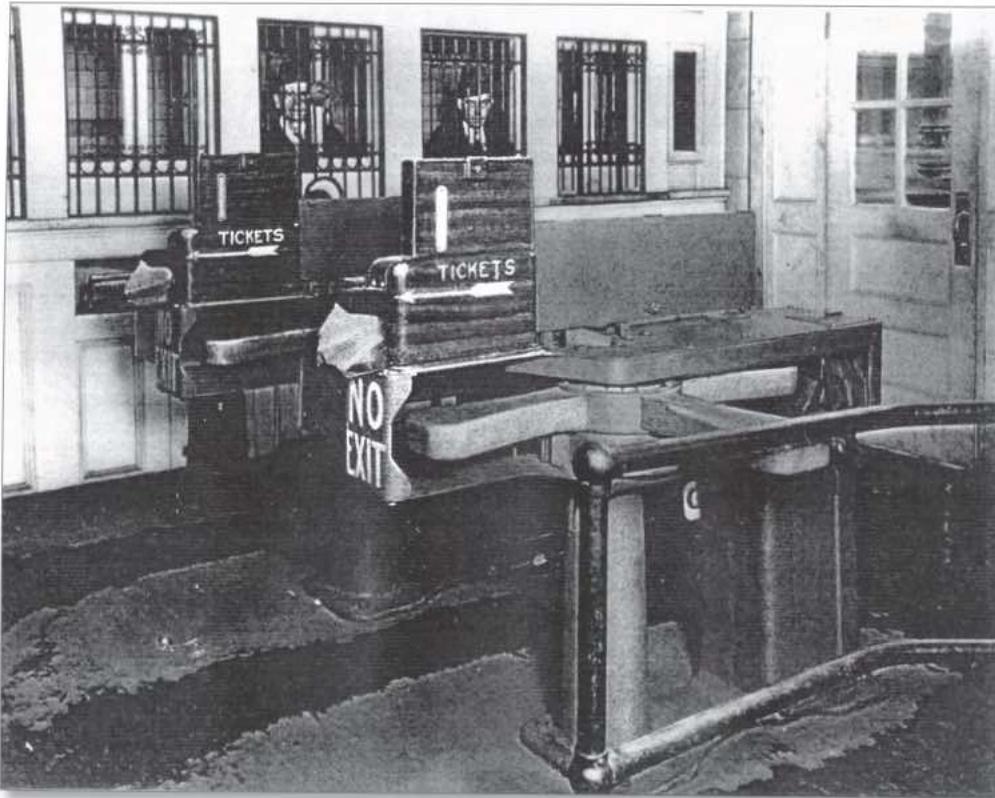
O'Reilly said that many leaders of the new union were "intimidated and unnerved" by this situation.<sup>19</sup> A way had to be found to deal with the problem. One way this was accomplished was through Clan na Gael and the Irish workers clubs. These were organizations of Irishmen (usually former IRA members) involved in various activities that included helping new arrivals with finances and jobs. They also arranged for lectures and gave out leaflets at subway terminals and bus depots.<sup>20</sup> "Clan na Gael" literally translated means "Family of the Irish." (It began in 1867 in New York to bring together different groups of exiled Irishmen fighting for a united Ireland. Even after the partitioning of Ireland, the Clan "continued to work for an independent, united, and anti imperialist Ireland."<sup>21</sup>) It was through Clan na Gael that these Irish subway workers first got together and began discussions on possibly organizing a union. The Clan was also instrumental in helping transit workers

*Illustration: A section of the by-laws governing the "company union" for IRT workers that O'Reilly was told he had to join in 1928. Courtesy of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.*

overcome the mistakes of previous organization attempts when company Beakies were able to unhinge the group by getting to the most active members. O'Reilly reported that the TWU began with small groups organized all over the subway, and by meeting in the private homes of members.<sup>22</sup> Besides the advantage of the Clan, the men used a tactic that earlier organizers did not. They obtained broad support throughout the many subway job titles by including men from each title to work from within the transit system. So while O'Reilly worked with the conductors, fellow Clan member Mike Quill worked with the ticket agents, mechanics, and other transit employees.

Number Two Brigade of the IRA.<sup>23</sup> Using his intelligence and flair for leadership, Quill eventually went on to lead the TWU for over thirty years—and earn the title “The man who ran the subways.”<sup>24</sup>

With the foundation of the new union set, there remained problems to overcome. The leaders were still a small group “that lacked a clear sense of how to further their ambitions” and how to convince workers to overcome the bitterness of past attempts at unionization and strikes.<sup>25</sup> This bitterness is exemplified by a story O'Reilly told of a train accident in the late twenties that killed a motorman. O'Reilly was the first to arrive on the scene, but was



Quill, like most of the other immigrants, had grown up on a small Irish farm and at an early age joined the struggle for Irish independence. He did not fire weapons, but acted as a scout and ran messages for the Irish Republican Army out of his family's farmhouse, which served as headquarters for the Kerry

joined shortly by a colleague who identified the dead man as a scab from a strike in 1926 and shrugged that the man's death was no loss at all.<sup>26</sup>

However, this core of leaders was succeeding in winning over their fellow workers through their determination, and through their

*Illustration:  
"Nickel-pushers" in  
the 1930s worked  
in metal cages that  
were unventilated  
and exposed to steel  
dust all the time.  
Courtesy of New  
York City Transit  
Museum Archives.*



*Illustration:  
Transit worker  
tends coal fire to  
keep a station  
warm (probably  
in 1930s) on the  
Third Avenue El.  
Courtesy of New  
York City Transit  
Museum Archives.*

reputations as IRA veterans and Clan members. Since the work force was predominantly Irish, these new leaders could show that they would fight transit management as hard and as long as they had fought the British in Ireland. And with Connolly's guidance as reference, gaining support of the Irish workers was greatly facilitated. Any doubting non-Irish workers could be regaled with stories of Ireland's struggles and quickly won over to the new union.

#### SEARCHING FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The success, however, brought the need for better organizing techniques that would require money. At this time in 1933, the upstart union was charging a one-dollar initiation fee and weekly dues of ten cents. These fees were not sustaining the costs of publicity for a monthly bulletin and for leaflets to be distributed at shops, barns, and terminals. The men reached out to Irish organizations for the needed aid. O'Reilly was a member of two committees that approached the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, and they were rebuffed in both cases. The Hibernians

explained that they did not take part in labor activities, and the Sons of St. Patrick could not help since the president of the IRT, George Keegan, was a member of their organization.<sup>27</sup> After being turned away by people who TWU leaders felt were their friends, turnstile mechanic Thomas O'Shea suggested that they try the Communist Party to get the needed assistance. O'Shea was another Irish-born former IRA member, who had been an explosives expert. He was also a Clan na Gael member who had made early contact with Communist organizers before passing his idea along to fellow workers.<sup>28</sup> O'Reilly, Quill, O'Shea and others went to the party's headquarters on Thirteenth Street in Manhattan and met with its executive officers.

After a long discussion it was agreed that not only financial aid would be given to the new union, but also "that the Party would assign members who could be whole time actively engaged in helping to build the union."<sup>29</sup> The support of the party was an important step in the development of the new union. Many Clan members, including Gerald O'Reilly, became members of the Communist

Party. However, the Clan group was not made up of pure ideological communists; they used the party for their advantage.

Examples of this behavior can be seen throughout the 1930s and 1940s. O'Reilly relates a story of a company union meeting in which Quill was attacked for his party affiliation, and he retorted that he would rather be "red than a rat."<sup>30</sup> Thomas O'Shea eventually became disenchanted with the communists to the extent that he was forced out of the union and testified against his old friends in front of the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities in April 1940.<sup>31</sup>

Then, finally, in the years between 1946 and 1948, a dispute developed over raising the fare to pay for contract improvements (a position opposed by the party), and Quill separated the union from the party for good. O'Reilly saw the party's opposition to raising fares as one of many mistakes that it made, but he sided with it at the cost of his position in the TWU. Quill supporters saw to it that O'Reilly was removed as a union organizer and returned to his job as a conductor.<sup>32</sup> In looking back at this dispute,

O'Reilly said that if the "TWU had sided with the Party we would have had no union."<sup>33</sup>

The Communist Party was useful for the Clan members at one time, but when that usefulness terminated the party was jettisoned. For these men the union was their first and last thought, and they believed it must be protected against any attack.<sup>34</sup>

**BEING RIGHT ON RACE RELATIONS**  
There was another area in which O'Reilly's union work and his principles of loyalty and fairness combined. His position on questions of race relations and job equality for black Americans continued to show that O'Reilly would rather be right than popular. O'Reilly was at the forefront of the decision in the 1930s by union leaders in favor of a proposal allowing blacks to be hired for all positions within the IRT.

Company policy at this time permitted blacks to be hired only as porters who cleaned stations, offices, and shops. O'Reilly stood with Quill at a special meeting in 1938 where the proposal was presented to the membership, which contained a large faction opposed to it. Quill reminded the members there, of whom a great majority were Irishmen,

*Twenty-Ninth*  
**COMMEMORATION**  
of  
**JAMES CONNOLLY**  
Irish Patriot and World Leader



**Friday, May 11, 1945 • Transport Hall, New York**

... PROGRAM ...

GERALD O'REILLY, Chairman

•  
DEDICATION  
•

STAR SPANGLED BANNER  
SOLDIER'S SONG  
NICHOLAS FARLEY, Tenor

•  
OLD IRISH AIRS  
C. B. O'CONNELL, Flute                      THOMAS MORAN, Violin

•  
IRISH DANCERS  
NANCY MULLARKEY                      MARY SULLIVAN                      ANDREW McCANN

•  
UNITED NATIONS SONG  
JOHN McHUGH, Tenor

•  
"DAWN OVER IRELAND"  
Historic Film of Struggle for Independence

•  
THE WATCHWORD OF LABOR  
Words by JAMES CONNOLLY  
NICHOLAS FARLEY, Tenor      Accompanied by KENNEDY FREEMAN

•  
THE MEANING OF CONNOLLY TODAY  
MICHAEL J. QUILL

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CONNOLLY COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE  
153 West 64th Street      New York 23, N. Y.

*Illustration: In 1945, the influence and leadership of James Connolly in the labor movement was commemorated in ceremony and program chaired by Gerald O'Reilly. Courtesy of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.*



“that is wasn’t so many years ago that we were denied many right as free citizens.”<sup>35</sup> With these words hovering in the air, and with O’Reilly and the other organizers prodding them, most of the membership could do nothing else but approve the proposal.

But O’Reilly did more than talk. He took it upon himself to accompany the first black motorman assigned to the Jerome Avenue line on his first day in order to assure a smooth transition.<sup>36</sup> The tour went without incident, and to make his position clear, O’Reilly took the man to a popular transit hangout on Fordham Road. The two men had a few beers and O’Reilly introduced the new motorman around. As O’Reilly and his new colleague said their goodbyes and turned to leave, a man at the bar took their beer glasses and threw them on the floor. O’Reilly was not naïve enough to believe that all transit workers would accept the spirit of the proposal passed by the TWU membership. However, he knew it was the right position to take, and he did all in his power to make it stick whether it cost him popularity or not.<sup>37</sup>

Gerald O’Reilly, as an American, fought for his union because he believed that workers should be treated with respect. That belief extended to workers of all races and creeds. As

an Irishmen in America, he never forgot his native country and believed that the entire country should be united under Irish rule.

#### WORKING FOR IRELAND

O’Reilly never let his union activities precipitate a diminishment in his fervor in working for an Ireland united under Irish rule. He used his great organizing skill and combined it with a prolific letter-writing ability to further his ideals. There was a meeting in early 1944 in New York where it was decided that “all people prominent in Irish organizations and Trade Unionists in America” should take part in an effort to get Ireland represented at a post-World War II peace conference.<sup>38</sup> After the meeting, O’Reilly wrote to a prominent Boston Irishman to request the names and addresses of that city’s important organizations and individuals so he could send a report of the New York meeting to them. His reasoning was that “It is only through our united efforts and cooperation that we can successfully achieve the goal we have in mind— Ireland’s freedom.”<sup>39</sup>

In late 1944, O’Reilly was in Chicago for the seventh annual constitutional convention of the CIO. He was on the drafting committee that helped write an important resolution

*Illustration:*  
O’Reilly (at left in hat) with IRT motormen and conductors early in 1940s after TWU won new rest facilities for its members. Courtesy of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.

presented to the convention by Mike Quill. The resolution called for a meeting to take place in London between union leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss increased cooperation between labor movements worldwide. It further called on the superpowers of the day to aid in the political process of uniting Ireland by giving the country a place at the post-war peace talks. When he returned to New York, O'Reilly wrote the press release reporting the resolution from the TWU headquarters. He called it "a splendid contribution towards achieving a just and lasting peace."<sup>40</sup>

In his quest for a united Ireland, O'Reilly was not the least bit daunted in letting high echelon politicians know his views. He once gave the Irish prime minister a tongue lashing in explaining his opinion of a fellow Irishman's view that out-of-country Irish should stay out of

The fearlessness and political savvy shown by O'Reilly in dealing with the Irish question was only one part of his concern. O'Reilly was also equally interested in the humanitarian issues of his native land. The year 1947 was a bad one for harvests of cereals and other staple foods in Ireland. This fact would cause hardship for the Irish people and would also create a need for increased medical supplies. Through advertisements placed in Irish newspapers O'Reilly let the people know that food and medical supplies were available in this country, and he also instructed them on how to their government to make direct requests for this surplus aid.<sup>42</sup>

#### WORKING FOR FRANK RYAN, JUSTICE, AND LIBERTY

Gerald O'Reilly's continued humanitarianism is exemplified by his actions taken on behalf of



Irish politics. He pointedly asked the prime minister for his stand on this issue, and also asked point blank if the prime minister thought Ireland had "an opportunity to win for herself complete independence and unification at this time when a world organization for lasting peace and international justice was in the making."<sup>41</sup>

Frank Ryan, an IRA leader captured during the Spanish Civil War. Ryan had been born in Elton, near Knocklong, County Limerick on September 11, 1902. In his late teens he became involved in Ireland's fight for freedom, and after graduating from college became a key figure in the movement. Ryan believed that the civil war in

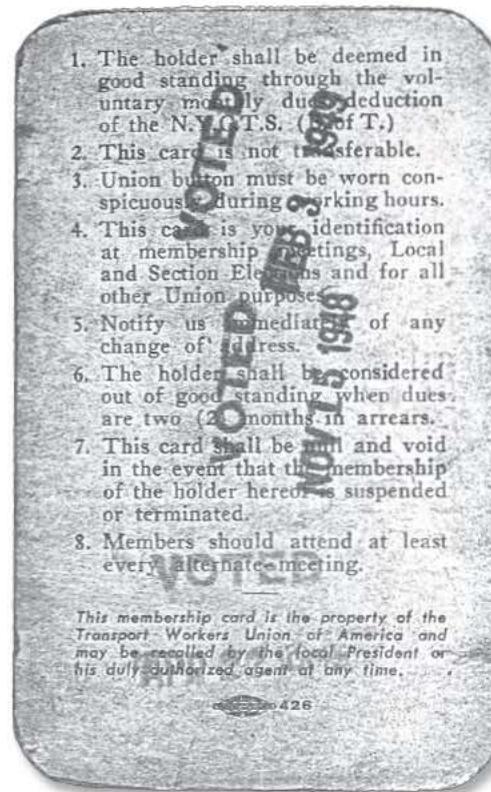
*Illustration:  
Photo taken in  
1965 shows Gerald  
O'Reilly discussing  
grievances with  
motormen. Courtesy  
of Robert F. Wagner  
Labor Archives,  
Tamiment Library,  
New York University.*

Spain during the 1930s was a test for all Irish patriots because he said, "the front line trenches of Spain are right here in Ireland."<sup>43</sup> As the situation evolved, Ryan knew that going to Spain was a "demonstration of the sympathy of

Gerald O'Reilly was present at the funeral on June 22 of that year.<sup>46</sup>

O'Reilly's dedication to the cause of human dignity was not confined to Ireland and the United States. He expressed his joy and relief at

*Illustration: Gerald O'Reilly's TWU union card issued in August, 1948 recorded his participation in elections during the following fall and spring. Courtesy of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Library, New York University.*



revolutionary Ireland with the Spanish people in their fight against Fascism."<sup>44</sup> O'Reilly corresponded with Ryan during the war, and discovered he had been captured and subsequently transported to Germany, which actively supported the Nationalists in Spain. After a daring submarine escape from Germany failed, Ryan landed in a German prison with a death sentence hanging over his head, and O'Reilly was part of the Irish-American Committee for the Release of Frank Ryan that petitioned both governments for an end to Ryan's captivity.<sup>45</sup>

Ryan died in prison before the committee could complete its task. But O'Reilly continued to work tirelessly throughout the years for the release of the man's remains so they could be returned to Ireland for a proper burial. All his hard work was rewarded in 1979 when the German government released the remains to three volunteers of the International Brigade.

the release of Nelson Mandela<sup>47</sup> from the South African prison he had been confined to under the apartheid government.<sup>48</sup>

For Gerald O'Reilly, all these issues in his life did not compete with his unionism; rather, they were intertwined with his larger struggle for justice and liberty. It was this universalism and broad social vision that made unionists like O'Reilly so effective.<sup>49</sup> O'Reilly did not abandon this struggle or vision after his retirement from the union at the age sixty-seven in 1970. He kept close ties to the union and continued to be active in the Irish national movement. Additionally, he gave considerable time and effort to the James Connolly celebrations, and he sent out many letters from his home on behalf of political prisoners in Ireland and many other worthy causes.<sup>50</sup>

The story of Gerald O'Reilly is the story of the TWU. For O'Reilly, the union and his fellow

workers were of first importance. Additionally, O'Reilly, Quill, and their compatriots were carrying on the traditions of the radical Molly Maguires of the Pennsylvania coal fields and of the late nineteenth-century New York City Irish worker groups. During the same time they were fighting for their own union, O'Reilly and Quill were also influential in the development of the city's powerful trade unions, which also were heavily Irish.<sup>51</sup> All these facts make it important to look at the lives of men like O'Reilly for insight into the overall struggle for better conditions in the workplace and the continuing advancement of Irish-Americans. His dedication to his union and the labor movement in general was rewarded in January 1991, seven months after his death, when a plaque in honor of him was installed at the Robert Wagner Labor Archives of New York University's Bobst Library on Washington Square in Manhattan. This honor commemorates a part of history created by Gerald O'Reilly and ensures that his role will be remembered and studied.

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- The Irish Times*
- Saoirse-Mean Fomhair*

## Notes

- 1 The New Deal provided the needed environment that protected the seeds of unionism and allowed them to grow. The increased union membership led workers to an economic turnaround not seen since the middle of the nineteenth century. See Joshua B. Freeman. *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.) v.
- 2 Under a plan approved in 1894, the city was to supply the money to build a subway system which it would own while private companies would lease the equipment and operate the lines. In 1933, the Interboro Rapid Transit was one of the two private rapid transit systems in operation.
- 3 Joshua B. Freeman. "Gerald O'Reilly: Pillar of Labor Dedication." Copy in the Gerald O'Reilly Papers, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at the Tamiment Institute Library of New York University. Text of a speech given at the O'Reilly Dedication in the library on January 16, 1991.
- 4 Freeman. *In Transit*. viii.
- 5 Gerald O'Reilly Memorandum. 1 The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1:Folder 2
- 6 Ibid. 1.
- 7 O'Reilly was made an honorary member of Irish Transport and General Workers Union. Cited in Freeman "Pillar of Labor Dedication." 2.

- 8 Gerald O'Reilly. Unpublished writing about James Connolly. 2 The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 2.
- 9 C. Desmond Greaves. *The Life and Times of James Connolly*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1972.) 309.
- 10 Perhaps Connolly's most important work is *Labor in Irish History*, 1910.
- 11 O'Reilly, Gerald. "James Connolly and the Transport Workers Union." 5. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 2.
- 12 O'Reilly Memorandum. 1.
- 13 Ibid. 1-2.
- 14 Ibid. 1.
- 15 Ibid. 2.
- 16 Shirley Quill. *Mike Quill Himself: A Memoir*. (Greenwich: Devin-Adair, 1985.) 46.
- 17 Ibid. 46.
- 18 Through the years there were many company sponsored unions and corporate welfare plans that were designed to thwart the threat of unionization. See Freeman, *In Transit*. 19-21.
- 19 Gerald O'Reilly. "James Connolly and the TWU." 3.
- 20 O'Reilly Memorandum. 5.
- 21 Sean Cronin. "James Connolly and the Transport Workers Union of America: The Ideological Link With Mike Quill and His Associates." 5. In the O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 9.
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- 23 Shirley Quill. *Mike Quill: A Memoir*. 19.
- 24 L.H. Whitmore. *The Man Who Ran the Subways: The Story of Mike Quill*. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1968.)
- 25 Freeman. *In Transit*. 47.
- 26 Ibid. 25.
- 27 O'Reilly Memorandum. 5.
- 28 Freeman. *In Transit*. 55.
- 29 O'Reilly Memorandum. 6.
- 30 Ibid. 6.
- 31 Whittemore. 87.
- 32 This termination lasted only a year. Quill's loyalty to an old friend and compatriot surfaced, and he supported O'Reilly's return to his old duties.
- 33 O'Reilly Memorandum. 8-9.
- 34 Whittemore. 88.
- 35 O'Reilly Memorandum. 8.
- 36 Freeman. "Pillar of Labor Dedication." 3.
- 37 Freeman. "Pillar of Labor Dedication." 4.
- 38 O'Reilly to Mr. Dan Horan. February 1944. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 1.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 TWU Press Release 22 November 1944. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 1.
- 41 O'Reilly to Prime Minister Eamon DeValera. 24 November 1944. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 1.
- 42 Draft letter from O'Reilly to Irish newspapers. 21 April 1947. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers. Box 1: Folder 1.
- 43 Sean Cronin. *Frank Ryan: The Search for the Republic*. (Dublin: Repsol Publishing, 1980.) 78.
- 44 *Irish Press*, December 14, 1936. Cited in Cronin. *Frank Ryan*. 84.
- 45 *The Irish Times*, Dublin. 12 August 1990. The O'Reilly Papers.
- 46 Cronin. *Frank Ryan*. 234.
- 47 Mandela was the leader of the African National Congress that fought against the apartheid government in South Africa. He was elected president after the end of apartheid.
- 48 *Saoirse-Mean Fomhair*, September 1990. The Gerald O'Reilly Papers.
- 49 Freeman. "Pillar of Labor Dedication." 5.
- 50 Joe Doyle. "St. Patrick's Day on the IRT." In The Gerald O'Reilly Papers.
- 51 Ronald H. Bayer and Timothy J. Meagher. Eds. *The New York Irish*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.) 355.