ART FROM THE FRONT: THE REPUBLICAN MURALS OF BELFAST AND DERRY

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Introduction

A Brief History of Northern Mural Art

The political murals that adorn the street gables and walls of Northern Ireland's towns and cities are a unique phenomenon. They are symptomatic, and a consequence of, a conflict that is politically and religiously based. Northern Ireland is a culturally divided society. The partition of the Six Counties from the newly formed Irish Free State in the Island of Ireland Act, 1921, was not an "arbitrary creation of British imperialism" (Farrell, 1976, p.326). Indeed, it was set up to serve as a partnership between the British establishment and Ulster industrialists, businessmen and landowners united together in the Unionist party. Mass support was assured by the Orange Order, whereby the fostering and exploitation of the differences between Protestant and Catholics in the north consolidated the Protestant-ruling class. Protestant-Unionist culture has always been dominant in Northern Ireland whereas the Catholic-Nationalist minority were offered subordination. This subordination has had a profound effect on Catholic-Nationalist expression, not least on the development and content of Republican mural art.

In the Protestant districts of Belfast there has long been a tradition of painting murals, dating back to at least the turn of the century. The most common theme depicted in these murals was William the Third at the battle of the Boyne. Such murals were usually painted as part of the ritual celebrations that commemorated King William of Orange's Protestant army's victory over the Catholic forces of King James the Second at the Battle of the Boyne, 1690. For the Nationalist minority, the cultural events and artifacts surrounding the Twelfth of July celebrations were – and still are – perceived as domineering, threatening and exclusive – "the Twelfth was thus inherently exclusive and triumphalist...Nationalists could not share the symbols because they were by definition symbols of a state in which they were not afforded full civil rights". (Rolsten, 1987, p.4).

In contrast to the long standing mural tradition of Loyalist districts there was no mural tradition in Nationalist communities until the early 1980s. Up until then, only two Nationalist murals are known to have existed both of them in the Catholic Ardyone district of North Belfast. One depicted Robert Emmet, a nineteenth century revolutionary Irish nationalist and the other, James Connolly, an early twentieth-century Irish socialist revolutionary. The absence of Nationalist mural art before the early 1980s was no accident. Catholics who painted political themes on walls faced police harassment and prosecution. In 1954 the Unionist regime passed The Flags and Emblems Act which prohibited the display of the Irish tri-colour. Unionist symbols "held a privileged position" (Bryson/McCartney, p. 69) and the painting of Loyalist flags and emblems was regarded as a civil right that was not extended to Catholics.

The event that triggered the "explosion" of Nationalist mural art was the 1981 Hunger Strike in which ten Republican prisoners starved themselves to death in an attempt at regaining political status (revoked in 1976 by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees). These early Republican murals were done in support of the prisoners by people with little or no artistic training. Their purpose was to mobilise popular support within the Nationalist community and they evolved as part of a collective Nationalist response that attempted to dissuade the British Government from letting the Hunger Strikers die. When the emotion and anger generated by this period had faded, the new found confidence of Republicans did not and the cultural revival in music and language continued unabated. Part of this revival included the painting of political wall murals in support of the Provisional IRA's armed struggle and Sinn Fein's post-Hunger Strike electoral strategy.

The past sixteen years have seen Republican murals evolve into a sophisticated form of political expression. Murals have been painted on a wide range of themes integral to the Republican struggle – military action, prisoners' rights, anti-censorship, historical themes, British oppression, Celtic mythology and international conflicts are issues that have all been addressed. Sinn Fein's decision in 1981 to contest elections gave Republican murals a further boost. Election murals were painted in support of Sinn Fein candidates and were to prove an effective means in which to elicit support from local Nationalist communities. During the Provisional IRA's 1994 ceasefire the street gables of the Nationalist ghettos were used by Republican muralists as a way in which to respond to an ever changing political climate. Murals articulated Republican demands, aspirations and prerequisites for peace.

Why Study Republican Mural Art ?

Northern Ireland's political wall murals have been, as Katie Lumsden points out, "dismissed as a serious area of academic study...for fear that this will in some way give credence to the message they contain" (Lumsden, 1995, p.1). The urban mural art of Belfast and Derry has been excluded (with a few notable exceptions) from serious academic research. As political activists, northern muralists "do not easily fit into the pattern of the stereotypical visual artist or art student" (Rolsten,1987, p.7). Few have received any formal art training and much of the work depicted rarely displays the individualism and the "proprietorial urge" (Rolsten, 1987, p.7) that is usually associated with visual artists.

In the course of my research it became obvious that the emphasis of most of the research and study done on the subject had encompassed the murals of both communities. The acknowledged authority on the north's political murals, Bill Rolsten (senior lecturer on sociology at the University of Ulster) has published several books on the subject which have provided an invaluable photographic record of both communities' murals and have given a brief history of the origins and significance of Loyalist and Republican mural art. Katie Lumsden's recent NCAD thesis "The Word on the Street – Belfast's political murals", has examined Belfast's political wall paintings, placing them in an international context and examining the circumstances that have given rise to this particular form of visual expression. The origins and history of the North's political murals has been well documented and this "macro-study" of murals was, I felt, important and relevant but it failed to address many important aspects fundamental to the painting of northern political mural art – it did not tell the whole story. The ever increasing sophistication of the north's political murals is clearly reflected in the design decisions employed by many of the muralists. Republican murals in particular, have evolved into a vibrant form of political agitation and a range of issues have been addressed with an innovation and cleverness applicable to trained graphic designers. It is an important aspect of Northern mural art that has been largely neglected by much of the existing research and it is one of the areas that my thesis sets out to examine.

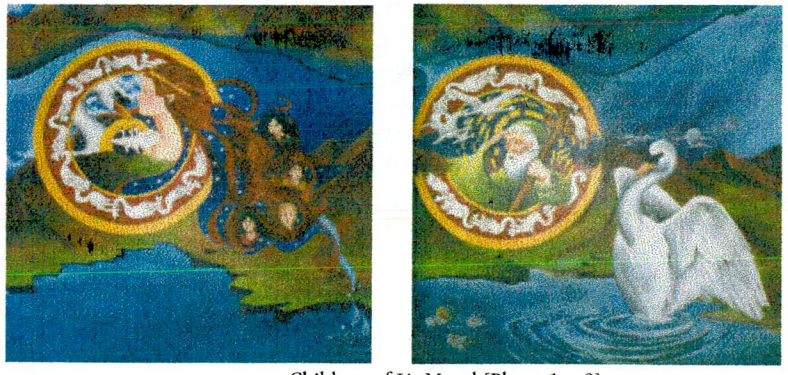
The Difficulties Involved in Researching Republican Mural Art

My thesis looks specifically at the Republican mural art that is to be found on the streets of Belfast and Derry and I set out to examine the rationale behind those who are closest to the subject – the muralists themselves. How did they value their work ? What was the thought process behind the design of the images they produced ? What were the difficulties they faced when painting a political mural ? Northern Ireland can be a dangerous place in which to live, especially if you are a political activist living in a Republican ghetto. The muralists who paint the images that this thesis documents receive constant harassment and intimidation from the security forces and are regarded as legitimate targets by Loyalist paramilitaries. It was only through the assistance of the Sinn Fein office on Sevastopol Street, Belfast, and the *Big Issue* magazine that I was able to make contact with both artists whose work this thesis sets out to analyse and I am grateful for their help. The subsequent interviews I obtained were with two of the leading exponents of Nationalist mural art in the north of Ireland. Gerard Kelly from Belfast and Tommy Kelly (no relation) from Derry have been responsible for some of the most striking imagery to have been painted on the gable walls of Nationalist housing estates. Gerard and Tommy talked in depth about the motivation and beliefs that have shaped their work and I was able to gain an important insight into how they viewed their respective city's political street art. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their time and honesty. In order to gain the greatest benefit from each interview, it was necessary to transcribe my conversations with the artists in full, a task that involved the typing of over twenty thousand words. My thesis makes extensive use of this primary source material and in order to facilitate the reader I have abbreviated the references when quoting the artists. Thus for example, I would use (T K, int.) for a quote that involved Tommy Kelly. The T K. represents the artist's name and the int refers to my interview with the artist in the unpublished transcript.

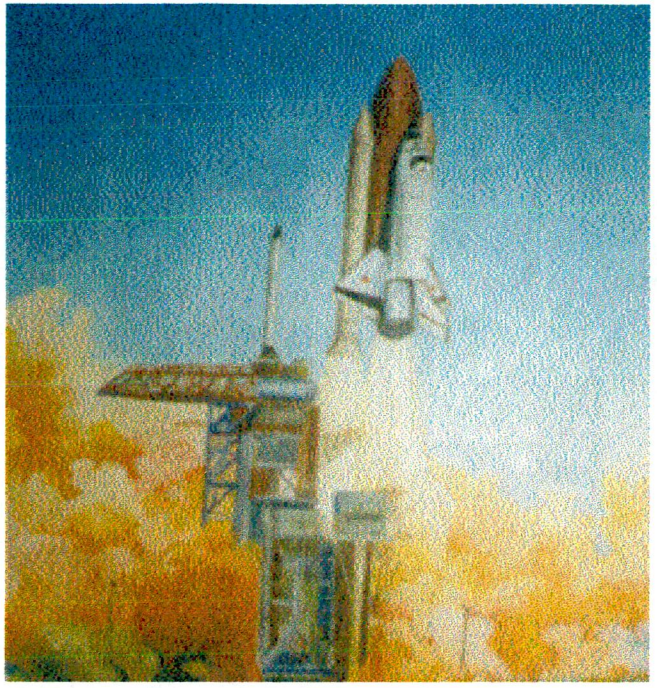
One of the major problems of researching northern murals is that they are a highly ephemeral phenomenon. Republican murals in particular, are targeted by the British Army and RUC and many are damaged and destroyed by paint bombs. The photographing of Nationalist murals can be problematic in itself and the researcher risks being questioned about his or her activities by the security forces. In order to record the most recent images that were on display I photographed over a nine month period between October 1995 and September 1996 the

murals of Belfast and Derry. In the course of my research I built up a collection of over forty photographs that document a diverse range of themes. During this time I was able to study the design of many of the murals and how they were adapted and used in order to respond to specific events. In the nine months I spent researching my thesis, Northern Ireland experienced the visit of President Clinton, the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire and a summer of mounting tension between the two communities over the rerouting of Loyalist parades. All of these events are covered and are related to the painting of political wall murals.

The purpose of this thesis therefore, is to analyse the design, concepts and rationale behind some of the most successful Republican murals that are to be found in the north's Nationalist ghettos. As a graphic designer myself, I intend to apply my own ideas in the analysis of the design of a number of important Republican murals. During the past couples of summers, I have had the opportunity of painting a number of community-based murals in County Westmeath (plates 1–4) which I hope will allow me a greater understanding and appreciation of the practical difficulties involved in the painting of murals. As a result of being brought up in Northern Ireland I feel I have an insight into and an empathy with the subject. I also believe that it is impossible to remain totally objective when writing, or indeed reading, about a conflict that is as controversial and decisive as the one that has bedevilled Northern Ireland for generations. Having been brought up in the Six Counties, I have had first hand experience of the troubles which makes it especially difficult to remain detached from the issues many of the murals address. I hope however, that my thesis can contribute to a greater understanding of this unique and vibrant form of political expression.

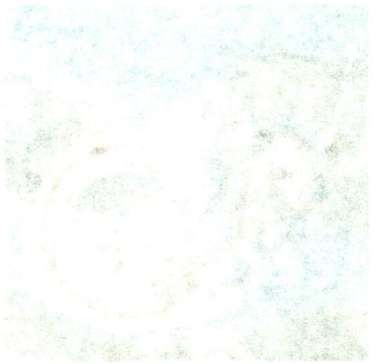


Children of Lir Mural [Plates 1 – 2].



Space Shuttle mural [plate 3].

Tennis mural [plate 4].



Chapter 1

The Murals of Gerard Kelly

Throughout the 27 years of conflict that Northern Ireland has experienced there has been, undoubtedly, a struggle over definitions. As Liz Curtis has argued, there is a "propaganda war" (Curtis, 1984 p. 25) in progress. The British media have a fairly constant set of definitions of what is happening in Ireland. They are pro-British, pro Unionist and anti-Republican. But in Northern Ireland there are also counter definitions to the established view that guarantees such a propaganda war can take place.

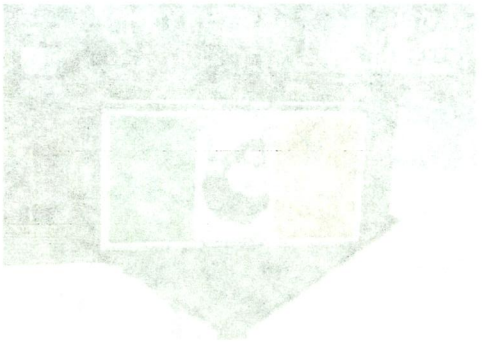
Bill Rolsten points out that the struggle for the hearts and minds of the North's Nationalist communities begins at local level where a battle for ideological domination is fought out between the established authority of the British Government and the subversive opponents to this authority, which comes mainly in the shape of the Republican movement. The existence of political murals is stark proof that the political conflict is "fought out at the local level and involves political activists using the paint brush as a weapon" (Sluka p.206). Over the past ten years one Republican muralist has emerged as the most prolific and accomplished. Gerard Kelly's gable images have featured on television and in newspaper photographs and have brought the artist college lectures and controversy. Above all else, they have played an important and effective role in the propaganda war of counter definition as advocated by the Republican Movement.

Gerard Kelly, also known as "Mo Chara", Irish for "my friend" has lived all his life in the heart of Republican West Belfast. During the early 1980s he served a prison sentence for politically related offenses and membership of the Provisional IRA. During his time in prison Gerard recognised the important role political murals could play in the north's propaganda war: "when I was in jail I used to get the papers in and sit and look at the murals and I said to myself I think I could do that" (G K, int.).

The first mural Gerard attempted was a photo-realistic poster-type mural of Gerry Adams in the run up to the 1987 election (plate 1). Shortly afterwards, eight IRA men were killed by the SAS in Loughal, County Armagh. Gerard knew three of the victims so he had a personal, as well as a political reason to paint a memorial mural: "I was in Long Kesh with three of these guys, Paddy Kearney, Paddy Kelly and Gerard O' Connell and I was very, very close to them" (G K, int.).

The resulting mural (plate 2) was influenced by the work of Jim Fitzpatrick. The IRA guard of honour are shown against a mythical landscape and sky based on the work of the Dublin born artist. The influence of Fitzpatrick's work is seen even more clearly in Gerard's next mural, (plate 3) an exact copy of Fitzpatrick's painting of the Celtic mythical hero King Nuada. The work of Jim Fitzpatrick (plate 4) appealed to Gerard Kelly for a number of reasons. Fitzpatrick's work represents mythical heroes like King Nuada as strong, powerful almost super-hero type figures. The detail of the artist's work, which combines intricate illustrations, primary based colours and traditional Celtic designs such as interlacing knot-work, spirals and oghams provided Kelly with the perfect inspiration for a mural that would represent all what he believes to be important about Celtic mythology – "this guy's thinking the way I think about Irish culture, Irish mythology" (G K, int.). Cultural murals are an important aspect to Kelly's work because he believes that such murals play a vital role in promoting an ancient Celtic culture that is second to none. The mythical landscapes painted by Fitzpatrick have been used by Kelly in murals that commemorate recent events in the Republican struggle. The Loughal mural, for example, substitutes the mythical heroes of ancient Celtic mythology with latter day Republican martyrs.

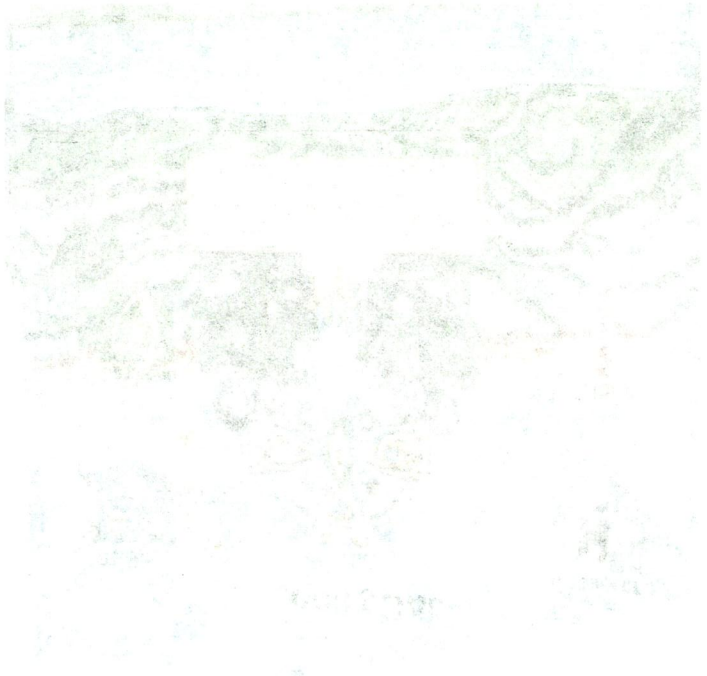
Gerry Adams election mural [plate 1].
The above mural was painted for the
1987 elections in which Gerry Adams was elected MP for
West Belfast.



Loughal memorial mural [plate 2].

King Nuada mural [plate 3].

Gerard Kelly was first introduced to the work of Jim Fitzpatrick during his time in prison. He was given *The Book Of Conquests* by a fellow prisoner and it was during this time that he began to work on the design for the King Nuada mural.



Republican areas had never experienced such murals before. The detail, colour and confidence was exceptional and over the next few years Gerard painted murals on a wide range of themes. His work dealt with issues as diverse as the 1981 Hunger Strike, Irish Republican history, prison issues, elections and international themes. Gerard explained the importance of political murals in the following way:

> When censorship was introduced they just tried to marginalise the Nationalist community and marginalise the struggle by normalising everything... And, I think the murals made it a wee bit harder for the Brits to get away with what they do because if there was [sic] no murals people wouldn't know any different (G K, int.).

Gerard does not consider himself an artist, explaining that his work is copied: "I believe an artist to be someone who can paint a thing straight out of his head on to a wall" (Irish News, 25 Aug, 1995). The purpose of his work is to inform people, it is art with a message. He believes that political murals have: "achieved the job they set out to do and more"(G K, int.). Although the aim behind much of Gerard's work is to articulate the Republican position, he dislikes the use of the word propaganda because it is a term that suggests "half truths".

Design Decisions

In the Nationalist ghettos of Belfast and Derry there is a "war" of the murals going on between the muralists and the security forces. The Army and RUC generally deface the murals while on patrol at night. Foot patrols write their own counter graffiti on murals and motorised patrols throw paint bombs at them. It is a problem that Gerard is only too familiar with and accepts as one of the consequences that comes with being a Republican muralist, "I don't think you can protect murals at all... .if it is destroyed, it's no big deal" (G K, int.).

Certain murals are attacked more frequently than others. Gerard's memorial murals to the IRA volunteers killed at Gibraltar and Loughal were attacked by the security forces within a few hours of their completion. Murals that commemorate the 1981 Hunger Strike were another favourite target (Plates 5 and 6) and it was a problem that forced Gerard to reassess the design of his murals. The difficulty involved in repairing detailed images meant a greater emphasis was placed on simplifying his designs without making the message of his murals any less effective (plates 7and 8).

> The likes of the Loughal mural was destroyed and attacked every week, it was very hard to repair, so I started to work like this here [plates 7–8] which was simplified but it still gets the message across. (G K, int.).

Detail of Jim Fitzpatrick illustration [plate 4].

The simplifying of images is interesting because it is an example of muralists using strong visual graphic devices that are uncomplicated yet effective in conveying a message to the public. Such murals are employing devices that are frequently used by graphic designers. The mural in plate 8, for example, uses four visual puns. A tri-coloured head is shown with its mouth gagged by a Union Jack handkerchief. The sequence is animated to show the hand pulling off the gag

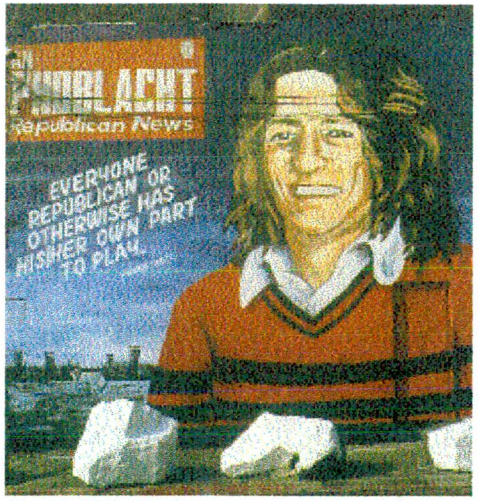
and releasing a dove which represents freedom of expression. Thus the mural deploys a visual narrative in order to get the viewer interested enough to read the mural's message. The theme of the mural is backed up by the accompanying text that combines the issue of censorship with an appeal to vote for a Sinn Fein councillor. An added advantage of simplifying images is that it is then possible to repair damaged murals using people who have very little artistic training: "You can get someone else to fill in your green and white; that is the reason why we simplified the murals" (G K, int.). Another example that shows some of the design decisions that are undertaken by muralists like Gerard Kelly is shown in the painting in plate 9. The mural was painted in commemoration of the Easter Rising and the image was copied from a Robert Ballagh poster. Originally, the entire proclamation was to be included but had to be omitted in the mural because of the difficulty involved in repairing it should it be defaced. As Gerard explained, "We were going to do the whole proclamation on it but the problem is that when you go into detail they are so easily destroyed it is a waste of time. So we actually abbreviated everything" (G K, int.).

The mural uses flat bands of strong bright primary based colours that contrast with the black and white details of the figures whose faces and bodies have been simplified. By omitting complicated details such as the wording of the Easter Proclamation, the mural has been made more resistant to attack because it is less complicated to repair. Another interesting aspect to the mural's design is found in the top half of the painting. The commonly used Republican motif of the phoenix (first used by the nineteenth century precursors of the IRA, the Fenians) is placed against a background of two flags – the Starry Plough (flag of James Connol'ys Citizens Army) and the Sunburst (flag of the Fianna). Both flags have been simplified and adapted in order to integrate them into the background image of the mural, making them less obviously flags. It is a design decision Gerard employs for two reasons:

a) by incorporating the flags into the overall image of the mural he is able to create an abstract pattern of colours that makes the painting visually more interesting.

b) it helps distinguish Republican murals from Loyalist murals which frequently use flags and emblems..

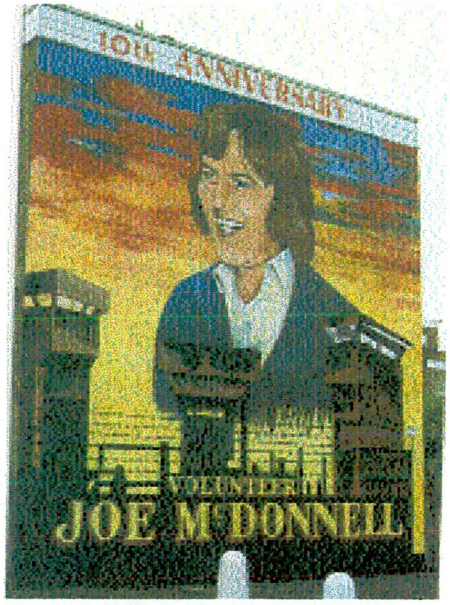
Other examples of murals that employ this technique can be seen in plates 10 and 11. The mural painted for a Women's Centre on the Falls road combines the portraits of several women from different countries (these include El Salvador, Nicaragua and Palestine) against a multi-coloured backdrop of shapes that radiate from a painting of the world that is enclosed in an international women's symbol. It is only when the mural is examined more closely does it become obvious that the seemingly abstract shapes and colours of the background are representative of the National flags of the women painted in the mural. By abstracting the flags and taking them out of their normal context, the artist has created a background image that is both colourful and ambiguous. The Nelson Mandella mural in plate 11 uses the back drop of an Irish Tricolour and ANC flag in a more literal way but by juxtaposing each flag at an angle to each other they are integrated fully into the overall design of the mural. The joining of both flags symbolises the uniting of the two struggles and provide a colourful backdrop for the rest of the painting. What is also interesting in the design of the mural is the treatment of the portrait of Nelson Mandella. The features of the face have been simplified and painted in black and white so as to make the face instantly recognisable yet easily reparable if attacked.



Bobby Sands mural [plate 5].
This Bobby Sands mural was painted on boards and has been used as a back drop to Sinn Fein party conferences.

Loyalist Murals

When I interviewed Gerard and Tommy I asked them what their opinion was on Loyalist murals. Both agreed that Loyalists had the right to paint murals on issues relevant to their political stand point. What Gerard objected to was the "kill Catholic murals" (*Irish News*, 25th Aug, 1990). He believed that Republican murals were nonsectarian and less intimidating than

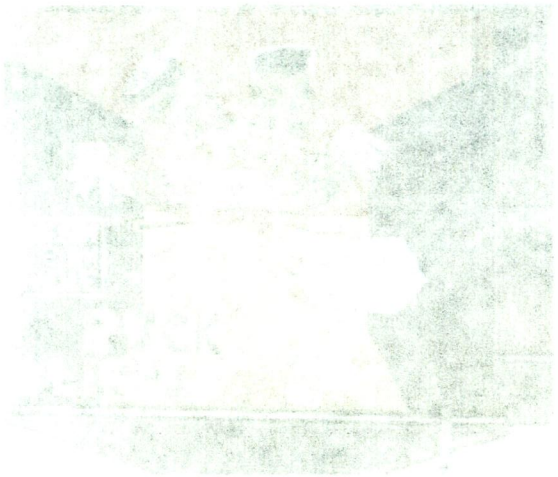


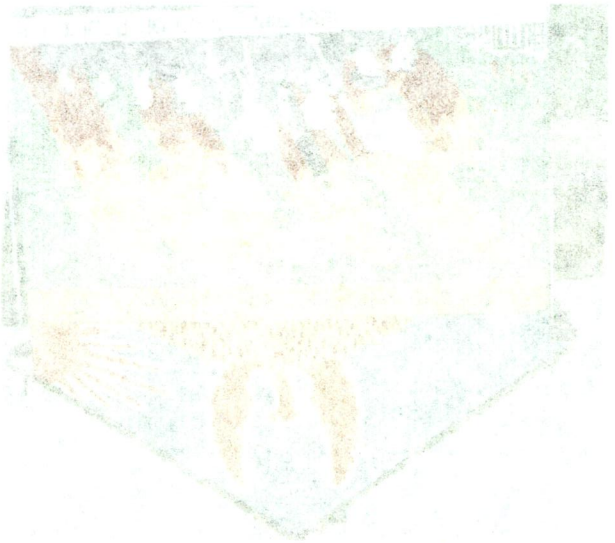
Joe McDonnell mural [plate 6].
The Joe McDonnell commemorative mural was painted on the tenth anniversary of his death on the 1981 Hunger Strike. It was destroyed soon after its completion.

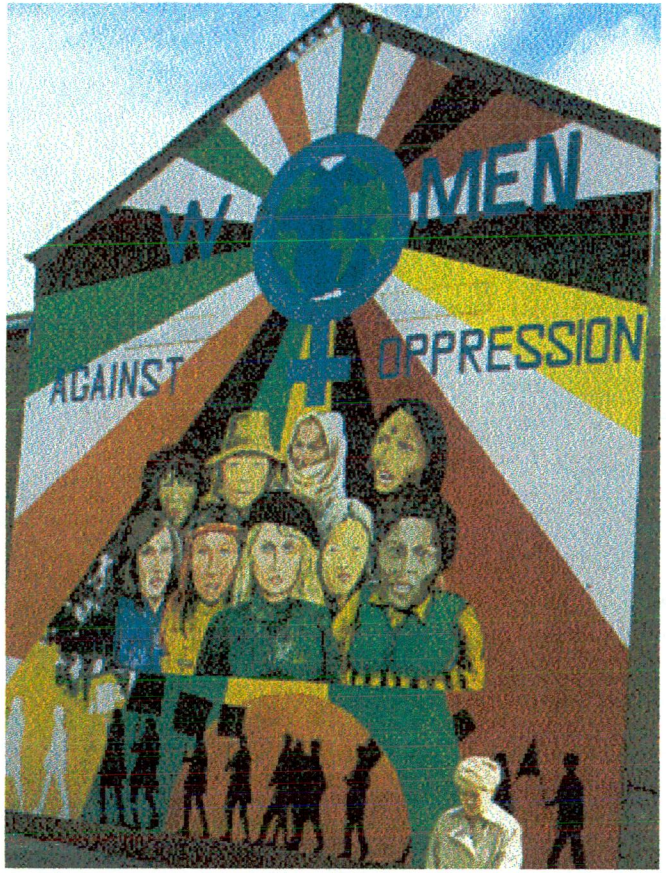
Fight back election mural [plate 7].

Oppose censorship mural [plate 8].

Easter 1916 mural [plate 9].







International Woman's Day mural [plate 10].

Nelson Mandella mural [plate 11].
Gerard informed me that a photograph of the above mural is hanging in Nelson Mandella's office.

many of the Loyalist murals which tended to be " threatening murals - there are a lot of murals of hatred. The likes of the Michael Stone mural where they are glorifying the murder of innocent Catholics" (G K, int.), see also plates 12 and 16. Tommy Kelly believes that some of the differences between Republican and Loyalist murals can be attributed to the differing aspects of Protestant and Catholic culture:

> I think that it's to do with the mentality. You find that Catholic/Republican/Nationalist people lean towards music the arts, drama, theatre poetry. Protestant people have been involved in commerce, industry, banking. and the Protestant work ethic and that Calvinistic type thing has permeated onto their psyche and it comes through in their art. What the Protestant/loyalist murals are about is getting the message across. (T.K, int.).

Michael Stone mural [plate 12].

To understand more fully what Tommy means it is important to look at the different relationship held between both communities in Northern Ireland. The Unionist population felt a sense of connection to the State – Nationalists one of alienation. During the Stormont Parliament (1922-1972) the Catholic middle class was comparatively insignificant, consisting of, as Fionnuala O' Connor describes in her book *In Search of a State, Catholics in Northern Ireland* "those who serviced their own community" (O'Connor, 1993, p.14). The denying to Catholics of their full civil rights meant that Nationalist culture was reproduced through a unique set of organisations for the encouragement of Irish sport, language, music and dancing – "the community became the only place where Nationalist culture could be more or less freely expressed" (Rolsten, 1987, p.5).

For Unionists the State "was their state"; Unionist symbols "represented this division – flags, anthems, events – expanded to civil proportions... these symbols became accepted as such by Unionists and rejected as such by Nationalists" (Rolsten, 1987, p.4). Loyalist and Nationalist murals represent this division. The alienation felt by Nationalists was exacerbated further by an increasing number of reported security leaks involving the RUC, UDR and Loyalist paramilitaries. The prolonged collusion controversy forced the RUC to call in an English police officer, John Stevens (who was then Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire) to investigate the issue. His report, published in 1990, concluded that a number of security documents had been leaked to Loyalist paramilitaries (McKittrick, 1994, p.163). During the ceasefire especially, a number of murals began to address this issue (plates 13–15) and a stylised painting of a skull wearing the combat fatigues of Loyalist paramilitaries came to symbolise collusion between the security forces and Loyalists (plate 15).

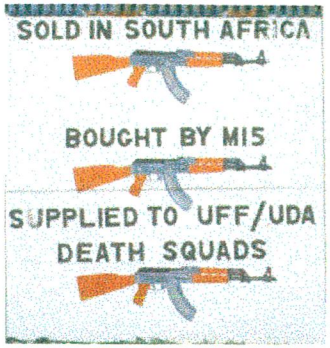
The majority of Republican murals are symbolic of Nationalist alienation towards the Northern Ireland state. Protest and resistance against British and Unionist rule are important themes articulated by many Republican murals. Commemorative murals that remember events like the Hunger Strike, Bloody Sunday and the The Battle of the Bogside (plates 5–6 and plates 5 and 9, ch. 2) serve not only as a reminder of historical events. They are also used to express the continuity of the Nationalist struggle by reminding the local population of past grievances. Nationalist oppression is seen as being cyclical and such murals play an important political socialisation role, reminding both old and new generations of defining moments in the northern conflict.

What struck me during the time I spent taking photographs of Republican murals in Belfast and Derry was the absence of purely militaristic type images. Of the 40 murals I photographed only one displayed a figure wearing the balaclava and army combats commonly associated with paramilitaries (plate 18). This contrasted with many of the Loyalist murals which, on the whole, displayed masked and armed men and/or Loyalist flags and emblems. Bill Rolsten put forward the view that the confidence of Nationalism and the isolation of Unionism came through in the murals: "even – or perhaps especially – when they are at their most militaristic. Republican murals exude a clarity of ideology, cause and target (British Imperialism)" (Rolsten, 1987, p.6). What I believe Rolsten means by this is that the Republican movement have a clearly defined set of objectives (British withdrawal and the end of partition) and Republican muralists have been successful in portraying this struggle. When concessions are gained by Nationalists it is seen as progress towards these objectives and a justification of the armed struggle. The electoral support Sinn Fein receives from the Nationalist community throughout the Six Counties has also contributed to this increased confidence. When the Provisional IRA called a ceasefire in August 1994 it was embraced enthusiastically by the Catholic population. The prevailing view was that substantive negotiations on Northern Ireland's future could now take place. By contrast, Unionists viewed the events with cynicism, believing the British Government had brokered a secret deal with the pan-Nationalist front that would eventually lead to the break up of the Union.

The increasing confidence of Nationalism is reflected in the content of the murals painted during the ceasefire. Murals articulated popular Nationalist issues (disbandment of the RUC, British decommisioning and withdrawal, release of political prisoners and all party talks) with an air of expectancy and optimism that was in stark contrast to the way the Unionist community viewed the cessation of hostilities. The difficulty for Loyalist muralists was in how to represent the ceasefire without showing signs of capitulation. Loyalist murals stressed the paramilitary potential of the UDA and UVF and served warning that the Union with Britain was unnegotiable. The content of much of these murals combined symbols of Loyalist identity with the reactionary street politics of paramilitarism. The merging of militaristic images with heraldic symbols; Red Hand of Ulster motifs and Union Jack flags expressed rigidity in the face of rapid social change. Unlike the older celebratory King Billy murals, these new paintings were intentionally anti-Nationalist and anti-Catholic. The images are sinister and threatening – that is their purpose. Subtly is sacrificed in order to emphasise with unambiguity the position of militant Loyalism.

Another problem faced by Loyalist muralists is that the location of Loyalism's most easily defined enemies are not easily portrayed in heroic terms. Events like the signing of The Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 added to the sense of isolation felt by Unionism. Everyone was seen as a potential enemy, (including the British Government), so how then is it possible to display visually the value of opposing policies in the name of remaining British?. The shift from the traditional King Billy murals to militant paintings done in support of the Loyalist paramilitaries is evidence that Loyalists believe the Union with Britain is anything but a certainty.

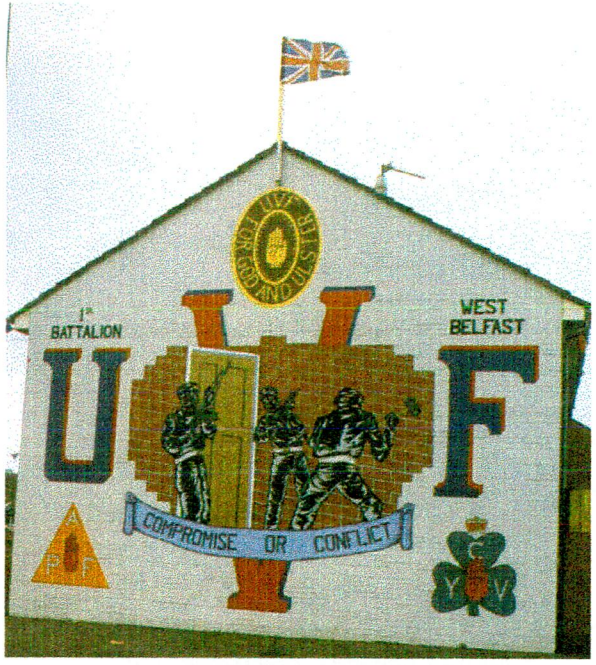
Republican murals are more than just a visual representation of Nationalist alienation and opposition to British rule. They are evidence of the clarity and confidence with which the Republican movement sees its objectives. Muralists like Gerard Kelly, struggling to change political arrangements, can draw inspiration from a wide range of sources. Republican murals articulate the issues and reasons that give rise to the conditions that allow paramilitary violence to take place. The vast majority of Loyalist murals by contrast, depict quite literally, the consequence of violence (the mural in plate 16 for example, shows a masked Loyalist gang, guns at the ready, breaking down a door in order to gain entry to the victim's house. The use of a sledge hammer is the preferred method used by paramilitaries to gain entry to houses in the majority of door step murders).



MI5 Collusion mural on arming Loyalist paramilitaries [plate 13].

End British Collusion mural [plate 14].

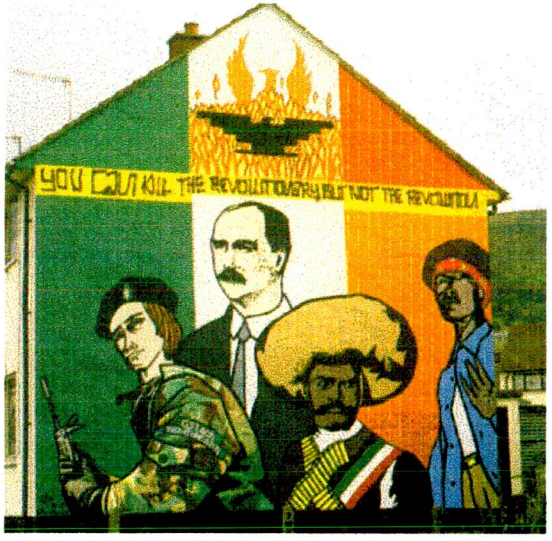
Collusion mural with deaths head [plate 15].



UVF Mural [plate 16].

Loyalist embolic mural [plate 17].

Militaristic Republican mural [plate 18].



Mural commemorating Mexican/American war [plate 19]. Gerard was helped in this mural by a mexican born artist, Ruben Ardias. The painting shows General Sambatta, a Gecanno, James Connolly and an IRA volunteer.

The differing approach taken by Republican and Loyalist muralists is highlighted by the attitude of Gerard Kelly when painting militaristic images. Gerard has tried not to paint IRA volunteers in military dress but in murals like the one in plate 19 he consciously avoids the use of masked figures or poses that could be deemed as threatening – "I always suggest to somebody who is painting IRA volunteers, always take the hood off because it makes them look less intimidating" (G K, int.). Republican muralists therefore, are aware of the importance of painting the right image, recognising how necessary it is not to convey an impression of aggressiveness or glorification of the violence that accompanies armed conflict.

Gerard justified earlier militaristic murals like the one painted to commemorate the events of Narrow Water (Eighteen British soldiers were killed by the IRA at Narrow Water Castle Warrinpoint County Down Aug 1979) (plate 20) in the following way:

> The one done about Narrow Water – I think that, I am not trying to justify or glorify death but I think what they were saying was that Bloody Sunday, the paratroopers went in and slaughtered us and this was a military action – Narrow Water was against soldiers rather that civilians. And, I actually think it give the people strength in that it was saying we are not helpless against the paratroopers or the British Government and it is their forces who are the real terrorists. (G.K, int.).

Bill Rolsten's view that Nationalist murals are able to exude a "clarity of ideology" when painting militaristic murals is applicable to how at ease Republican muralists are with painting events like Narrow Water (plate 20) because they represent the targeting of a designated enemy – the British Army. Republican muralists are much less tied to one or two historical or mythical events. Commemorative murals, murals of protest, mythical events and international themes are all used as a source of inspiration. Kelly recognises the importance of identifying with people and struggles from around the world. Nationalist muralists have drawn on anti fascist graphics and commercial film posters to reveal an "innovation in style and symbolism absent in Loyalist murals" (Rolsten, 1990, p.5). Recently, a small number of Loyalist murals have attempted to look for other sources of inspiration. The mural in plate 21 seeks to use, ironically, Cuchulainn as a symbol of an independent Ulster. (This was based on Cuchulainn's defence of Ulster from Queen Mebh's attacks from "the south"). Thus Cuchulainn is represented as being, in effect, the first UDA man.

Nearly all of Gerard Kelly's murals have been painted within a small geographical area of West Belfast. They exist to be consumed – renewable or replaceable as needs be. In a conflict where the favoured forms of communication are controlled by those opposed to the Republican Movement's objectives, Kelly's murals have played a key role in the north's propaganda war. The interest they have generated is reflected in a number of books and articles that have been written in an attempt to analysis their content, cause and effect. In a guerrilla war one of the most important "fronts" is the propaganda front. In such a war a paint brush can be just as important a weapon as gun or a bomb.

Narrow Water Mural, [plate 20].

Loyalist Cuchulainn mural [plate 21].

The image of the dying Cuchulainn is taken from a sculpture by Sam Sheppard that was installed in the GPO Dublin in 1935 as a memorial to those who died during the 1916 Easter Rising.

Chapter 2

The Work of Tommy Kelly

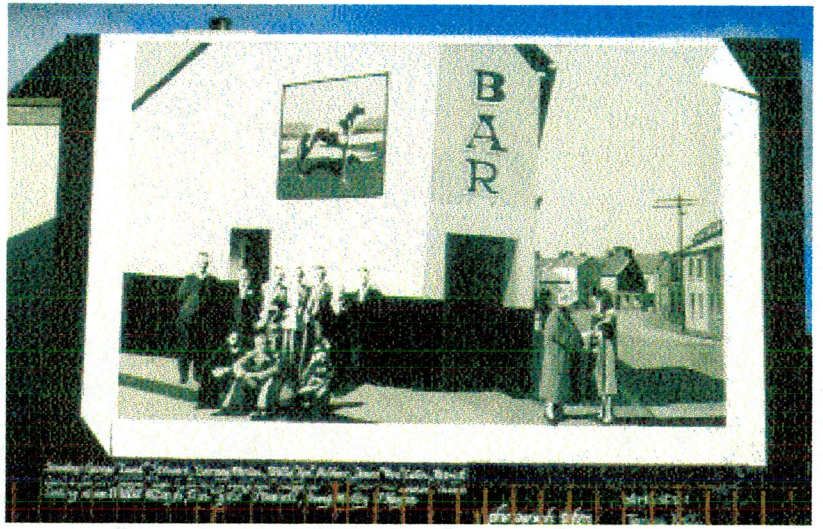
Norman Mailer has referred to graffiti as "your presence on their presence" (Sluka 1992, p.191). Political murals are like graffiti in this sense. In the North's Nationalist ghettos' resistance and defiance is articulated in the form of mural art – their presence on your presence. Nowhere is this expressed more eloquently or powerfully than at "Free Derry Corner", Derry city.

As you approach the Nationalist Bogside from Derry's city centre you are confronted by two majestic and disturbingly realistic examples of large scale street art. Each painting portrays events fundamental in the shaping of the North's Nationalist psyche – The Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday. Done in near photographic detail, they serve as a constant reminder to anyone who views them that the significance of both events is not to be forgotten. Their popularity within the Nationalist community and the level of exposure they have received is testimony to their success as murals. Both are the work of local born artist Tommy Kelly.

Tommy has lived all his life in the Bogside, a sprawling working class housing estate on the West Bank of the river Foyle. It is an area that has a long association with Republicanism and has suffered much in the way of economic hardship and political conflict. Tommy comes from an artistic family: his father was an artist, as is his brother and he himself took to art from a very young age. It was while working on an ACE scheme that was connected to the Orchard Gallery that Tommy decided he wanted to paint a mural: "What bothered me, at the end of the year everything was disposable and we didn't actually have anything to justify our existence so I came up with the idea of doing a mural (T K int.).

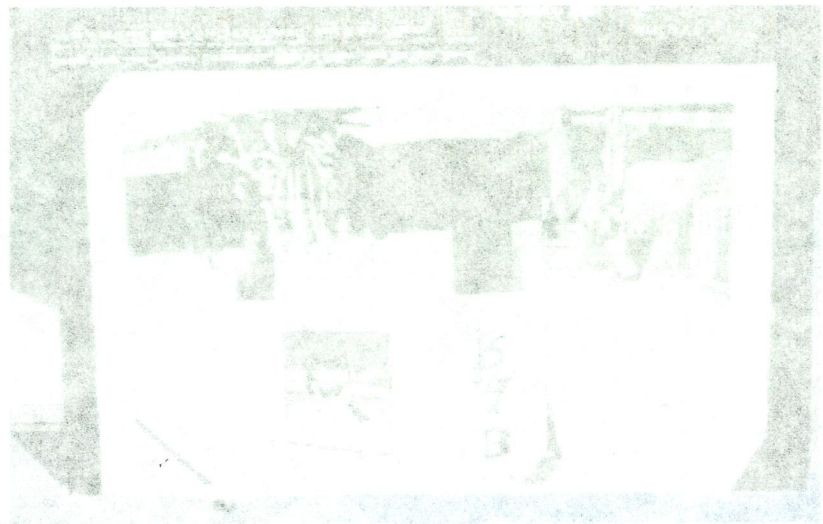
Tommy's first mural, (plate 1) attempted to highlight the scourge of unemployment and economic hardship that had affected generations of working class communities throughout Derry. Unemployment was a major a political problem that had affected successive governments. During the 1920s and '30s the rate of people out of work was as high as 28 per cent and during the Great Depression of the 1930s economic disaster threatened the jobs of thousands of Protestant workers, thus wiping out their marginal advantage over their fellow Catholic workers. During this time the Catholic and Protestant working class united in a struggle for survival in a state dogged by economic hardship and poverty. According to T Geehan in a speech given at St Mary's Hall Belfast in 1932:

> For many years the workers of Belfast had been divided by artificial barriers of religion and politics but the past two months had witnessed a wonderful spectacle because the workers are now united on a common platform demanding the right to live (Farrell, 1976, p.127).



Old Timers mural [plate 1].

In Northern Ireland today, Catholic communities remain seriously disadvantaged, particularly in the area of unemployment. The social position of working class Catholics is reflected in a survey that found Nationalist dissatisfaction to be based on economic as well as political alienation. 31 percent of Catholics and 19 per cent of Protestants cited unemployment as the biggest problem rather than constitutional or political issues (Mc Kittrick, 1994, p.22). In the Nationalist ghettos the unemployment rate is double that of anywhere else in the British Isles. In Derry, Nationalist areas like the Bogside and Creggan have unemployment rates as high as



56 per cent. A similar rate of unemployment affects the most deprived Loyalist areas. The association between high unemployment, divided communities and violence has long been recognised. The Loyalist Shankill and Crumlin areas of West and North Belfast are the heartlands of both Protestant unemployment and Loyalist paramilitarism. Tommy Kelly set out to show that unemployment and social deprivation were not exclusive to any one community and was neither a "friend of the Protestant people or the Catholic people – poverty was an economic disease that transcended religious boundaries" (T K, int.).

In order to achieve this, he based a mural on old black and white photographs of past characters who had lived in Derry. It was a scene that was easily identifiable to both communities as the people depicted were not indigenous to any one area or tradition. They were devoid of any political or religious baggage that could be construed as promoting one tradition over the other. The concept behind the mural attempted to remind working class Protestant and Catholics that they had much in common and what divided both communities were ideological and religious differences.

The mural was very well received by the people of Derry and Tommy found his skills as a muralist to be very much in demand. His large black and white photo-realistic images were used to brighten areas that had been scarred by paramilitary and sectarian graffiti. Tommy did not want his murals to be read as political statements or works of propaganda; they reflected issues devoid of "heavy handed bigoted statements" (T K, int.). He believed that his message would have more weight by producing work to a high professional standard: "even for its craftsmanship and skill, if I could get their attention, then maybe the message would get through" (T K, int.) The emphasis was not placed on generating original images, rather the purpose of his work was to communicate visually the issues that affected working class communities in general, "Therefore, I'll always be painting in a language that the best part of the community, I hope, understands" (T K, int.). By using existing photographs that depicted local people and communities that had experienced the social deprivation that comes with being unemployed, he wished to show how little things had changed for working class communities, both Catholic and Protestant. Tommy's community-based murals share some of the characteristics of political posters (as for example, the posters produced by the Russian Constructvists in the 1920s and '30s). They exist to mobilise people in the community and their job is, as Sonntag explains, " to confirm, reinforce and further disseminate values held by the ideologically more advanced strata of the population" (Rolston, 1987, p.6). Perhaps the clearest indication to the popularity of Tommy's murals is highlighted by the offer he received to become involved in a cross-community mural project in the Loyalist Fountain Estate.

Tommy's Fountain Street Murals

When I first read about Tommy Kelly in the *Big Issue* magazine (July 6 – 1994), I was surprised to learn that he had spent time painting murals in a Loyalist area of Derry City. Having been brought up in the troubles myself, I was aware of the difficulties involved in being able to transcend the Religious divide. The fact that Tommy, a Catholic from a Republican area like the Bogside, was able to spend a year painting murals in a Loyalist housing estate was, I felt, a very encouraging development and was something that I wanted to learn more about.

When I interviewed Tommy he explained to me that he had been asked by Jeanette Walke, a community worker in the Fountain estate, to take part in a project that involved introducing Protestant and Catholic kids to one another by getting them to work on community-based murals. Jeannette had approached the UVF and UDA and explained to them that she wished to paint over Loyalist graffiti that covered the local Youth centre. They refused her permission, but rather than shelve her plans she went ahead and primed the walls. The popularity of Tommy's work as a muralist made him an obvious candidate for supervising the project and after an initial hesitancy he agreed: "This is where my socialist ideals and beliefs were tested and I either stayed in my own wee enclave or else I bite the bullet here. So I said yeah ... I'll come up and paint the murals" (T K, int.).

Tommy spent a year in the Fountain estate painting a series of heritage murals (plate 2) that depicted the area as it was in the late 50s and 60s. The images were taken from a selection of old photographs donated by members of the estate and Tommy found the experience both rewarding and enlightening "Like them, I was brought up with the idea that these people wanted nothing to do with me or my community...but I'll tell you something, I learned so much from working in that community, and during the year I spent there the community embraced me" (T K, int.).

To understand more fully the difficulties of partaking in cross community projects in Northern Ireland it is important to analyse some of the origins and causes that have influenced the sectarian conflict there. Republican and Loyalist violence must be seen in the context of the demographic differences that distinguish Belfast and Derry. The upsurge in violence in August 1969 resulted in large scale displacement and polarisation of both communities. Most of the movement took place in Belfast. Whole areas that had been mixed became segregated as one side or the other moved out. A report furnished to the Scarman tribunal showed that 1,820 families fled their homes in Belfast in the months of July, August and September 1969. 1,505 or 82.7 per cent were Catholics (Farrell, 1976, p.265). Since 1969 analysis of population trends has shown that the degree of separation between Protestant and Catholics is increasing year by year, with the number of segregated areas doubling in the past two decades. In Derry, almost all of the Protestant population has abandoned the city centre and moved across the river Foyle to the Waterside or further away to the town of Limavady.

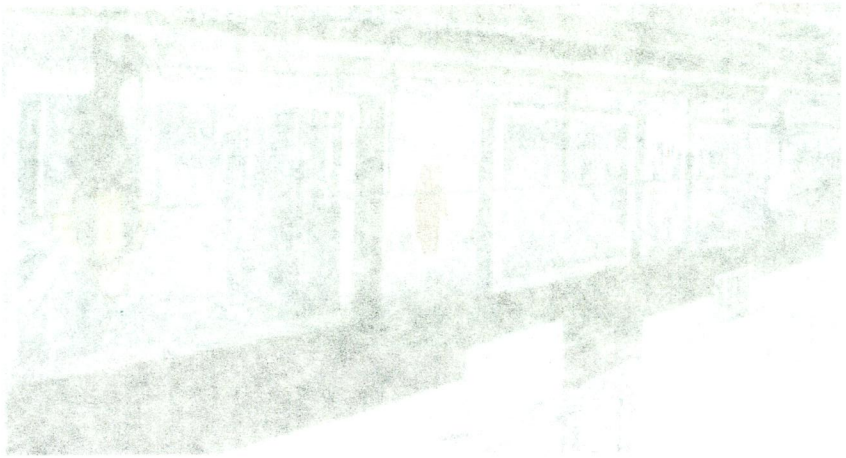
Tommy's Fountain estate Murals [plate 2].

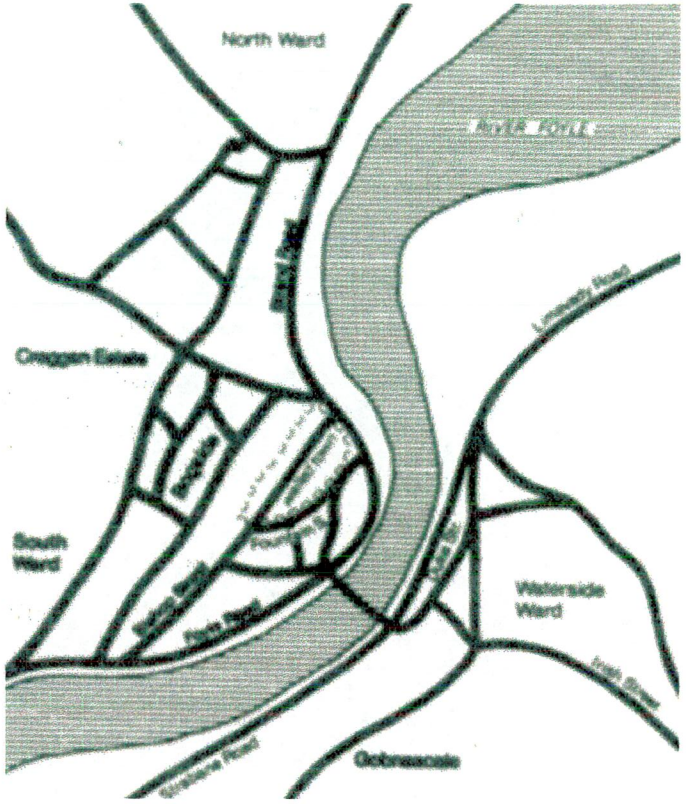
Belfast and Derry share many similar problems: the association between high unemployment, divided communities and violence are common factors, yet it is only when we study the geographical differences between the two cities do we begin to understand why Belfast has suffered a greater level of sectarian conflict. The map of Derry (plate 3) shows clearly the segregation of the Nationalist West Bank from the predominantly Loyalist Waterside. Both communities are segregated by a clear demarcation line – the river Foyle and therefore are made less accessible to each other. By contrast, Belfast is made up of a "patch-work" of Catholic and Protestant areas that in many cases are separated only by man-made peace lines. This is especially the case in North Belfast (plate 4) where over half the doorstep murders in Belfast have taken place. Murray and Brown described the reasons for this increased ratio in the following way:

> Unlike the rest of the city where there is a fairly tidy pattern of segregated and mixed areas the North presents much more of a patch work pattern This facilitates sectarian murders in two ways. Firstly the areas are relatively easily to penetrate. Their smallness means that they are quickly traversed while unlike the large ghettos in the south there are few men to provide local defence. Secondly, all possible target areas are near to secure areas such as the Shankill and Ardyone. (Feldman, 1991, p. 72).

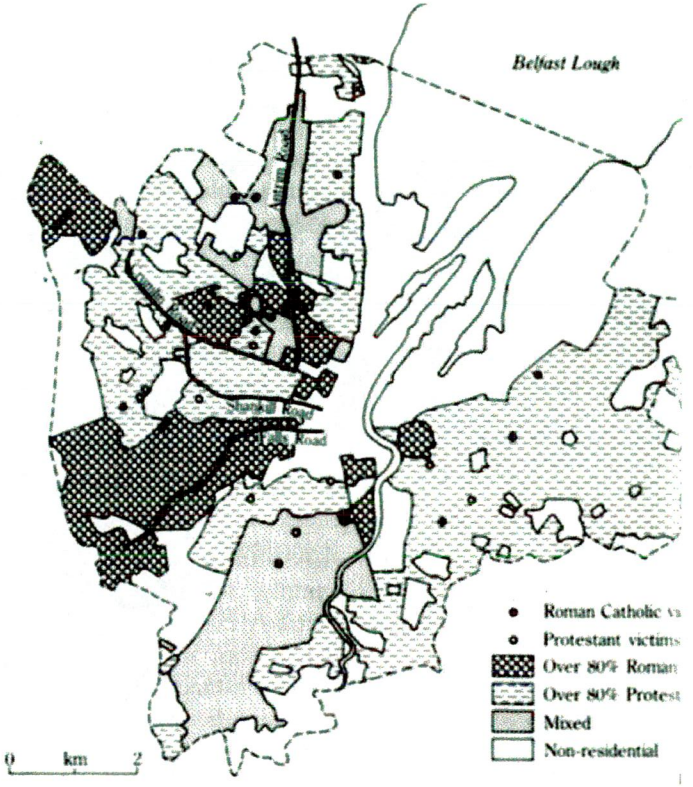
The higher percentage of sectarian killings that have taken place in Belfast is reflected, I believe, in the responses given by Tommy and Gerard Kelly, on how they view the possibility of cross community projects involving the painting of murals taking place in their respective cities. Tommy believed that the creative process involved when painting a mural would "help build up confidence between the two communities" (T K, int.). Gerard's view from Belfast was much less optimistic: "At this particular moment no...possibility, maybe we could end up painting a cultural mural, make a statement about who we are. Not at the moment. Safety would be a big factor" (G K, int.).

The trust needed for any form of cross-community cooperation is a fragile thing that is relative to events and perceptions. Soon after Tommy finished his project in the Waterside he was approached by his own community to do a painting in commemoration of The Battle of the Bogside. It was a painting that meant Tommy had to take the chance that his work might "be interpreted as a piece of small-minded bigotry" (*Big Issue*, 1995, p.8). Soon after completing The Battle of the Bogside mural the offers of cross community work stopped and it was made clear to him that he would be no longer welcome to work as a muralist in a Loyalist area: "Soon after I got a death threat from the UVF posted from Belfast... saying Republican muralist – listed for execution." (T K, int.).

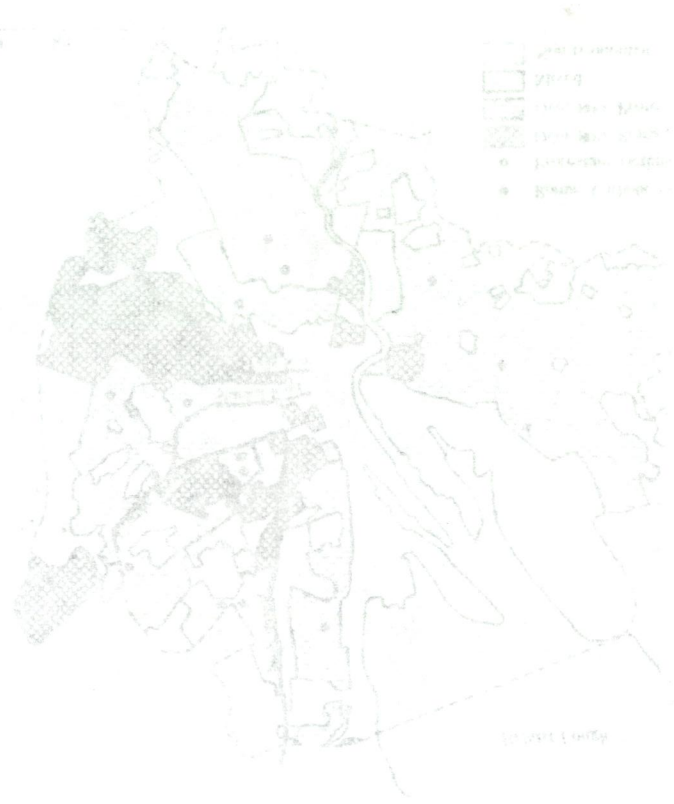




Map of Derry showing Catholic and Protestant districts [plate 3].



Map of Belfast showing Catholic and Protestant districts and areas where most number of door step murders have been carried out [plate 4].



Mural in Commemoration of the Battle of the Bogside

Jeffrey A Sluka believes that the importance of the north's political murals lies in their: "symbolic representations of the political conflict between the two ethnic communities"(Sluka, 1992, p.190). Perhaps the clearest and most effective representation of this conflict can be seen at Free Derry Corner (plate 5). Here the onlooker is confronted with an image that is both majestic and disturbing. Painted on the gable wall of a block of flats and standing over twenty feet high, the mural depicts a thirteen year old boy embroiled in the violence and mayhem of the early troubles. Immersed in pales of CS Gas and flanked by B Specials he confronts us wearing a broken gas mask and holding a petrol bomb, primed and ready to throw.

To understand the significance of the image it is important to remind the reader of the events that the mural depicts. August the twelfth was traditionally the date when the Apprentice Boys of Derry, one of the Protestant Loyal Orders, celebrated the action of thirteen Apprentice boys in slamming the gates of the city to the army of King James the Second at the start of the siege of 1689. Orangemen were accustomed to march through the city and around the walls overlooking the Bogside. During the summer of 1969 tension was at an all time high. Northern Ireland's Nationalist population were on the verge of open revolt as they demanded the Civil Rights denied to them by the Unionist dominated Stormont Government. Catholics were in no mood to be reminded of their inferior position in the north and organised the defence of their areas.

The expected battle ensued when the Orangemen, heavily guarded by the RUC and B Specials approached the fringes of the Bogside. The siege lasted for three days and only ended when British troops were deployed. The British commander withdrew the RUC and B Specials and agreed not to enter the Bogside. Free Derry city had been re-affirmed.

Meanwhile, throughout the north, Nationalist and Loyalist areas erupted in street violence. In Belfast especially, the destruction was at its most extensive and the death toll was at its heaviest since the 1920s. The state was rocked to its foundations; the course of the north's political history was decisively altered – the consequence was to be over 25 years of political conflict.
When Tommy was commissioned to paint a mural on The Battle of the Bogside he was aware of the difficulties involved in painting an event that had such a bearing on the Northern Troubles "You have to take your stand and unfortunately when you do that in Northern Ireland people do colour you, paint you in a certain way" (T K, int.). Tommy was forced to weigh the difficulties that came with commemorating such an event with the need to paint a mural that had an important relevance for his own community. It was also an opportunity to showcase his skill as a muralist. The emphasis would be put on depicting the anniversary with a painting of genuine quality and Tommy felt it important to do the painting well as it was an opportunity to take murals in the country "up a level." (T K, int.).

The central figure of the mural is lifted directly from a photograph by Clive Limkin (plate 6), who then worked for *The Daily Sketch*. It was one of the most famous images ever to have come out of the northern Troubles. It featured in Limkin's book *The Battle of the Bogside* published by Penguin in 1972, and was awarded the *Life* magazine's Robert Capa Gold Medal for combat photography. Limkin captioned the photograph in the following way:

> If ever we photographers needed a symbol of the fighting, this was it. Wearing an over sized gas mask; a petrol bomb permanently in his hand, so it seemed, and a map of the whole problem on his jacket. For hours he taunted the police and troops, ignoring the cameras. He was about eight. God knows what he has advanced to now.
>
> (Colin Darke, Creative Camera, 1995).

Tommy believed the image symbolised accurately the resistance of the Nationalist people of Derry, not only during the Battle of the Bogside but throughout the subsequent years of conflict. He also believed the mural had an international appeal with a relevance and a significance that reached beyond the Nationalist communities of the north. It set out to claim solidarity with people who were experiencing similar conflicts and who would perceive themselves to be similarly oppressed. The symbolism of the image therefore, gave it a relevance that stretched beyond the Bogside. Its message could: "just as easily be read in the West Bank in Palestine or Tenniam Square or Colombia or San Palo" (T K, int.). Tommy denied that the mural portrays an event of "local insular bigotry", asserting that the image was designed to appeal to an outside audience as well as reminding the local people of the area to "what had

Mural in commemoration of the Battle of the Bogside [plate 5].

Original Limpkin Photograph of youth in gas mask during the Battle of the Bogside [plate 6].

happened here – we had a gerrymandered system in the Bogside...we had a gerry mandered system akin to South Africa" (T K, int.). He believes that the event the mural commemorates was the inevitable consequence of the Unionist led Stormont Government's refusal to concede full civil rights to the Nationalist population and the Battle of the Bogside was to prove a catalyst for Nationalist anger.

The difficulty in painting a mural in commemoration of an event such as the Battle of the Bogside is that in a society that is as divided as Northern Ireland what is celebrated by one tradition remains an anathema to the other. The Battle of the Bogside signaled to the British Government that the Unionist lead Stormont regime had lost control of the situation. Their response was to deploy the British army on to the streets of Belfast and Derry. Protestants viewed the events with outrage, seeing the whole Civil Rights Movement as an attack on their State. According to Chichster Clarke: "This is not agitation of a minority seeking by lawful means the assertion of political rights. It is the conspiracy of forces seeking to overthrow a government democratically elected by a large majority" (Farrell, 1976, p.261).

Viewed in present day terms, it is possible to argue that the mural represents a justification of the Republican armed struggle. The central message of the mural is that out of oppression springs resistance. It is a theme that numerous other Republican murals have addressed. Perhaps the best indication of how the Loyalist community responded to the mural is represented by the death threats that Tommy received when he had completed the painting. It reveals that what is jealously guarded by one community in Northern Ireland is usually reviled by the other. The Battle of the Bogside mural fulfils a number of important roles that more overtly Republican murals set out to achieve. It serves to remind both the local and international community of the events that took place during the early days of the present northern Troubles. By emphasising in such a dramatic way, an event as emotive and decisive as the Battle of the Bogside it contributes to the political education of the local population – at least from a Republican/Nationalist perspective. The mural not only commemorates the event, it seeks to legitimise Nationalist violence by reminding those who view it to the origins of the conflict. Thus it fulfils a role of political socialisation. The scene depicted is that of a young boy, barely into his teens, embroiled in the heat of battle. He is armed with the weapon of the oppressed (a petrol bomb) and wears a gas mask in order to protect himself against the CS Gas of the B– Specials and RUC. Tommy believes the youth of the mural to be a potent symbol of the violence that is beyond his control, a victim of circumstance: "that young man of 13, his area and family are being attacked by the police that are dressed in black. Now that young guy doesn't know shit about politics right?. But he looks out and sees injustice and therefore he does what comes natural – he arms himself" (T K, int.). Tommy justified the painting of the Battle of the Bogside mural in the following way:

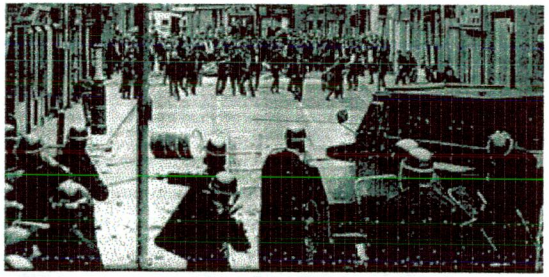
> I painted the petrol bomb mural which is simply a photographic piece of history. It is not a piece of of propaganda. Someone looking at a painting of the Battle of Waterloo in the Royal gallery in London wouldn't say it was a piece of bigotry or sectarianism rubbish. They would say it's a piece of history. (T K, int.).

The reason why Tommy's mural fails to "transcend the sectarian divide" lies, I believe, in the fact that both communities in Northern Ireland are a long way from resolving a conflict that has afflicted generations. Because the northern troubles are unresolved it is impossible for either community to look at an event such as the Battle of the Bogside with any type of objectivity. Tommy's mural represents historical events from a purely Nationalist perspective – the scene depicts the B-Specials and RUC as the aggressors whereas the role played by the people of the Bogside is symbolised by the young boy whose only form of defence is a petrol bomb and a broken gas mask. Thus the violence of the Nationalist community is seen to be a reactive response to Loyalist aggression. By depicting an event that had such a significant bearing on the troubles the mural was always going to be controversial. It is clear that the Loyalist community is fundamentally opposed to the events that the mural represents, seeing it as a justification of Republican violence. Tommy believes the mural depicts a scene that is in essence a photographic piece of history yet it is possible to view the symbolism of the mural as a reaffirmation and proclamation of the present day Republican armed struggle.

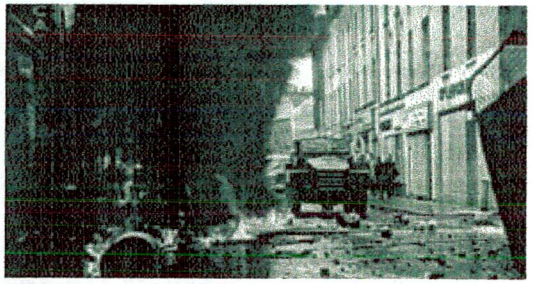
The level of exposure that Tommy's mural has received has also contributed to the controversy. Its success as a mural rests on the quality of the painting. We do not see a badly produced reproduction of a famous photograph but are instead able to view a painting that is done in near photographic detail. The scale of the painting engulfs the onlooker, it does not

have accompanying text explaining what it symbolises because the power of the image speaks for itself.

Tommy was critical of much of the Gallery based art that he had seen, describing it as "self indulgent" (T K, int.). The purpose of his work is to reflect the issues and concerns that affected his own community. His appropriation of existing images was justified by the need to paint in a language "the best part of the community understands" (T K, int.). Greater emphasis is placed on communicating visually the issues that are important to his own community by producing works of genuine quality. In both of Tommy's commemorative murals (plates 5 and 9) he has manipulated existing source material in order to articulate visually his perspective on events. The central figure of the original Limpkin photograph (plate 6) has been transposed onto a stylised version of events that took place during the Battle of the Bogside (plates 7 and 8 depict scenes from the actual riot). The immediate foreground is taken up by the youth who is placed against a smoke filled background. To the right of the figure is Rossville flats (located near Free Derry Corner at the time of the riots and now demolished), an important strategic building from which Nationalist rioters launched attacks on the RUC and B-Specials as they tried to enter the Bogside. In the bottom right corner of the mural B Specials are depicted in full riot gear and are firing baton rounds and CS gas into the Bogside. The design of the mural is made up of a collage of existing images that are used out of context in order to give the scene added drama and visual impact. The lack of concern Tommy places on conceptualising events or generating purely original images means his murals should be viewed as less the work of a Fine Artist and more the work of a Graphic illustrator who uses the street gables as his canvas. In this respect his work is similar to that of Gerard Kelly. Where he differs is that he sets out to apply a professional standard of craftsmanship to all of his work. The quality of the mural is seen to be as important as the message it contains and it is an approach that differs from the more pragmatic way Gerard views his work: "No, I don't think you can protect murals at all because if someone comes out at one o'clock in the morning and throws paint on the mural then by the time I see it the paint is hardened. So I just repaint it and take the chance and if it is destroyed it's no big deal" (G K, int.). It is a problem that Tommy has not yet experienced as his two most controversial murals (Plates 5 and 9) have never been damaged by the security forces. The reason for this may be that his murals are less overtly Republican than much of Gerard's work. Certain murals, such as IRA commemorative works and paintings honouring the Hunger Strikers (plates 5 and 6, ch 1) are signaled out and attacked much more frequently than cultural, historical and mythological based murals (see plate 3, ch 1)



B-Specials and RUC men confront Nationalist rioters during the Battle of the Bogside [plate 7].



A police vehicle ablaze during the Battle of the Bogside [plate 8]. Tommy used these types of photographs as a reference for the background image of his mural.

The Bloody Sunday Mural Controversy

The purpose of a political mural is to: "Act as a daily reminder of a clearly articulated statement of collective political identity" (Rolsten, 1987, p.4). As such, it stands along side other political and cultural symbols in the area as a creator and maintainer of ideology. An important consequence brought about by the success of murals is that the images are subject to the individual interpretations of a large public audience. The controversy surrounding the mural painted by Tommy Kelly as a memorial to the 14 people who died during Bloody Sunday exposes many of the difficulties that this can cause for the muralists who serve to create for their communities, "symbols of political ideology".

Bloody Sunday.

Bloody Sunday was a defining event in the Northern Ireland conflict. The shooting dead of 14 unarmed civil rights protesters on the 30th of January 1972 by soldiers of the British Paratroop Regiment had a traumatising effect on the Nationalist population, the ramifications of which were felt throughout Ireland. Bishop Edward Daly, destined to go down in history as the priest who was captured on film waving the white handkerchief (plate 11), described the grief he felt following the event in the following way

> The experience of Bloody Sunday had a major effect on my life. I cannot come to terms with the use of guns or weapons. I've almost become paranoiac in my fear of them. But I know it had the opposite effect on quite a lot of other people, particular the younger people of Derry. A lot of those who may have been pacifist before the 30th of January 1972 became militant as a result of it. It was certainly a major influence on the growth of the IRA in Derry, and I think,on a broader scale as well (Mc Kittrick, 1994, p.179).

In Derry there are two levels of "scar tissue" left by Bloody Sunday: the first is the shooting itself and the effect it has had on the families of those who were killed; the second by the exoneration of the soldiers' actions by the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery who carried out the official investigation into the shootings The Widgery report has, as David McKittrick points out, "entered Irish Nationalist lore as a classic example of an English cover-up" (McKittrick,.1994, p.180). The British Government has never apologised to the people of Derry for the actions of its soldiers nor have they attempted to clear the 14 innocent people who were killed during the demonstration of any wrong doing.

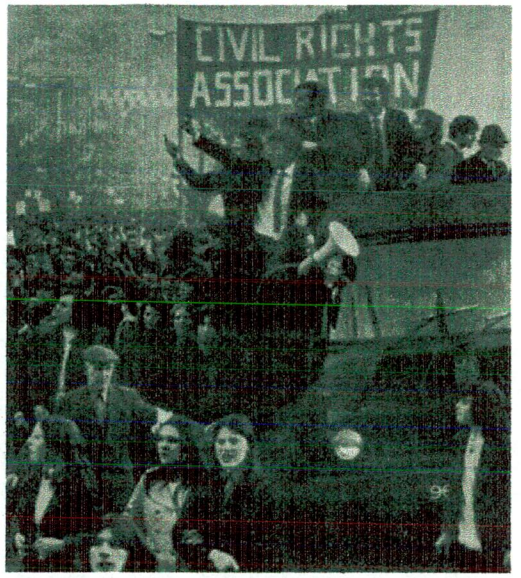
In August 1995, Tommy Kelly and fellow artists Kevin Hassen and Sean Loughry were commissioned by Tony Doherty of the Bloody Sunday Justice Group to paint a commemorative mural as a memorial to the people who had died during Bloody Sunday. The resulting mural can be seen in plate 9. The central image shows a bent over Father Daly waving a white handkerchief as he attempts to lead three civil rights marchers who are carrying the dying body of a fellow protester, Jackie Duddy, to safety down William Street. In the immediate foreground has been painted an armed and masked paratrooper who is shown standing on a crumpled Civil Rights banner that has been smeared with blood (the only colour used in the mural) The background depicts a section of the crowd who were present at the march and are shown marching down William Street before the shooting started and to their right is a lorry that was used as a mobile platform for the speakers of the event (plate 10). Like the petrol bomb mural, Tommy has manipulated existing imagery in order to create the greatest visual impact. The soldier in the immediate foreground is the largest figure depicted in the mural. His face and eyes are hidden by a gasmask (compare with 25 Years of Resistance mural in plates 9 and 11, ch.3) and he looks on at a scene of carnage, his contempt for the protesters (and by definition, Nationalists in general) is shown by the fact that he stands on a blood stained civil rights banner. The design of the mural tells a visual narrative. The demonstration is represented by the background image of the people marching down William Street and the aftermath of the soldiers actions are symbolised by the dead body and the blood stained civil rights banner.

Tommy explained that the purpose of the mural was to "sum up the slaughter that took place during Bloody Sunday" (T K, int.). An important element of the mural's theme was to show that the march was not "an IRA, Republican, Sinn Fein rally" (T K, int.). The mural was intended to remind people, especially the young people of Derry, of the injustice's of Bloody Sunday by showing what had happened "in all its gory detail".

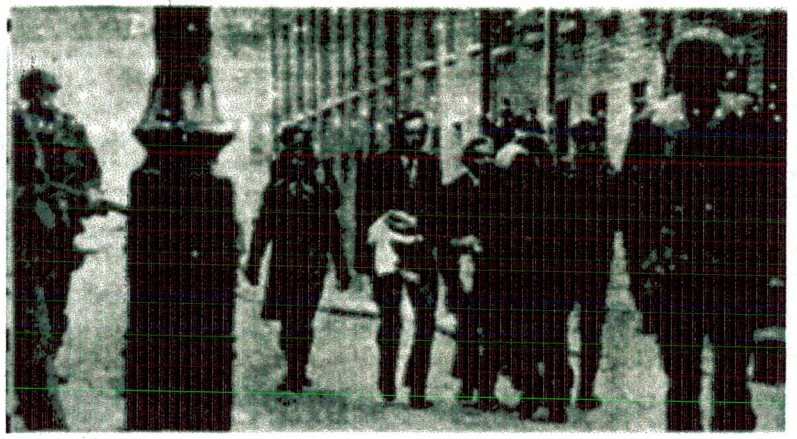
The Nell McCafferty Hot Press Article

The controversy surrounding this mural began when Derry journalist Nell McCafferty (also from the Bogside) wrote an article in the *Derry Journal* and *Hot Press* magazine strongly criticising the content of the mural and how it had depicted the events of Bloody Sunday. She accused the artists of "painting woman out of the living history of Derry" (*Hot Press*,1995, p.41). Her belief was that the mural "side lined women" (*Derry Journal*, 1995) because it failed to recognise the contribution and sacrifices made by people like Bridgit Bond (chairperson of the Derry branch Civil Rights Association) and Bernadette McAliskey (the main speaker on the day). "The mural showed an exclusively male population, according to it, not one woman was present on Bloody Sunday 1972. It was men only who were in charge of the Civil Rights

Mural painted in commemoration of Bloody Sunday [plate 9].



Photograph showing mobile platform used by speakers during Bloody Sunday. Notice the woman holding the loud speaker, used in Tommy's mural to symbolise female involvement during the days events [plate 10].



Photograph of Father Daly who is shown leading three men who are carrying the dead body of Jackie Duddy shot by the paratroopers. It is this sequence of film footage that makes up the central image of Tommy's Bloody Sunday mural [plate 11].

Association which called the demonstration that awful day, men only who marched, men only who were shot, wounded and killed" (*Hot Press*,1995, p.41). She concluded her article by lambasting the three artists responsible for creating the mural, believing them to be "perfect examples of male chauvinist piggery, of unreconstructed corner boys at work".

The Bogside Artists Response

The basis of McCafferty's articles was that the mural failed to represent female involvement on the day of Bloody Sunday which in turn demeaned their role in the Civil Rights movement as a whole. Tommy justified the content of the mural in a written reply to both the *Derry Journal* and and *Hot Press* magazine pointing out that the purpose of the mural was to "render a specific moment in our history that is of particular importance to the people of Derry" (*Hot Press*,1995, p.42). He believed that McCafferty's article set out to make "a cheap feminist point out of a mural that obviously had nothing to do with sexism or feminism" (T K, int.). Her criticism went "beyond comprehension".

The most difficult task faced by Tommy and his fellow muralists was in how best to represent an event as sensitive and emotive as Bloody Sunday through the visual medium of the mural. McCafferty's article initiated a heated debate amongst the people of Derry on how accurate the mural was in portraying that day's events. In one letter to the *Derry Journal*, Colin Darke criticised the historical accuracy of the mural, believing that by using original source material as a reference the painting was always going to be fundamentally flawed – "in future the muralists could try coming up with an image of their own rather than copying photographs produced by a profit motivated, and therefore political – motivated, information industry". He believed that the mural should be "removed, rethought and redone" (*Derry Journal*, 1995).

The problem of visually representing the role played by women during the Northern troubles is that on the ground they were often relegated to a "servicing role". The difficulty lies in finding graphic images of women who were trying to hold a family together, "of wondering where her wee lad is in the middle of a riot". In a male-dominated conflict the most dramatic images and coverage of events (including Bloody Sunday) usually involve the activities of men, whether this be the British soldier in uniform, the handkerchief waving priest or the mortally wounded victim. An over reliance on existing imagery as source material can be problematic – the artist is restricted to the representation of events as portrayed by other people (usually news photographers/cameramen) whose main concern is capturing the drama of an event in order to accompany a breaking news story.

The artists attempted to highlight the role played by women during Bloody Sunday symbolically – the figure shown with a loud speaker on the lorry's platform is Bridgit Bond, (plates 9-10) but this is is obvious only upon close inspection of the mural. There was an acknowledgement by the muralists that the painting failed to address adequately "the role and presence of women on Bloody Sunday" (McMenamin, 1995) which was caused partly by "an over reliance on particular photographs" (plates 10 and 11). The concept behind the image was two fold. The mural set out to portray the carnage of that day's events and the suffering of the people involved while at the same time highlighting who the perpetrators were – "we had to symbolise that by one big paratrooper and we wanted him standing on a civil rights banner" (T K, int.). Fundamental to the mural's theme is the consequence of the soldier's actions – the shooting dead of 14 unharmed demonstrators.

The controversy and debate that took place over Tommy Kelly's Bloody Sunday mural highlights some of the difficulties involved in pleasing all sections of a community, even when there is a general consensus on the issues being communicated. The popularity of Tommy's earlier petrol bomb mural rests partly on the power and symbolism of the original Limpkin photograph. It is an image that is able to commemorate an event like the the Battle of the Bogside in a universal way and transcends issues such as gender because it does not seem to promote the role played by one sex over the other. The mural's central theme is represented by the young boy caught up in the heat of battle and it is an image that is able to portray Nationalist resistance during the Battle of the Bogside without excluding any one section of the community. In the depiction of the youth, his face hidden by a gas-mask and with primed petrol bomb in hand we are confronted with a product of conflict – the shape of things to come.

Perhaps it is impossible to paint a mural on an event such as Bloody Sunday and satisfy all those who have been affected by it. What this episode does show however, is that the effectiveness of murals as a visual medium can bring its own problems – the artist must treat

his or her subject matter with an integrity and sensitivity similar to that of any professional graphic designer or advertiser. The events surrounding Bloody Sunday have still to be resolved and recent Nationalist calls for a new inquiry in the light of new evidence that was disregarded in the original Widgery report has been rejected by the British Government (Channel 4 news recently broadcast radio transmissions of the Paratroop regiment, gathered by radio enthusiasts, which show that the commander, Colonel Wilford, was aware that soldiers were shooting at protesters from the city walls over looking the Bogside). A new book, edited by Don Mullan, *Eye Witness Bloody Sunday* also casts doubt on much of the original enquiry findings. The emotion and anger generated by the events that took place in Derry on January the 30 th 1972 is summed up by an editorial in the *Irish News* that points out that, "This single act of barbarity remains a reminder to Nationalists of the brutality carried out in the name of law and order" (*Irish News* 1997). Bloody Sunday is an event that has sunk into the Nationalist consciousness and brings its own special difficulties when trying to commemorate it visually through the medium of the wall mural. The controversy surrounding Tommy's mural is conclusive proof of this.

Further Difficulties Involved in Painting Political Murals

The political murals that are found in the working class housing estates of Belfast and Derry have become a normal feature of the urban landscape of the ghetto – "they have become so ubiquitous and normal a apart of the environment that some have become landmarks" (Sluka, 1992, p,213). Dr Belinda Loftus, author of *Mirrors: William the Third and Mother Ireland,* does not like to use the term "political art" or "folk art, "to me it's painting, interacting with the environment" (Kelters, *Irish News*, Aug 1990). Many of the murals painted by Tommy and Gerard Kelly are done on a voluntary basis. A lack of funding for equipment and materials is usually a major determining factor on the content and style of a mural. Sometimes paint is paid for by the local community, on other occasions it is donated .

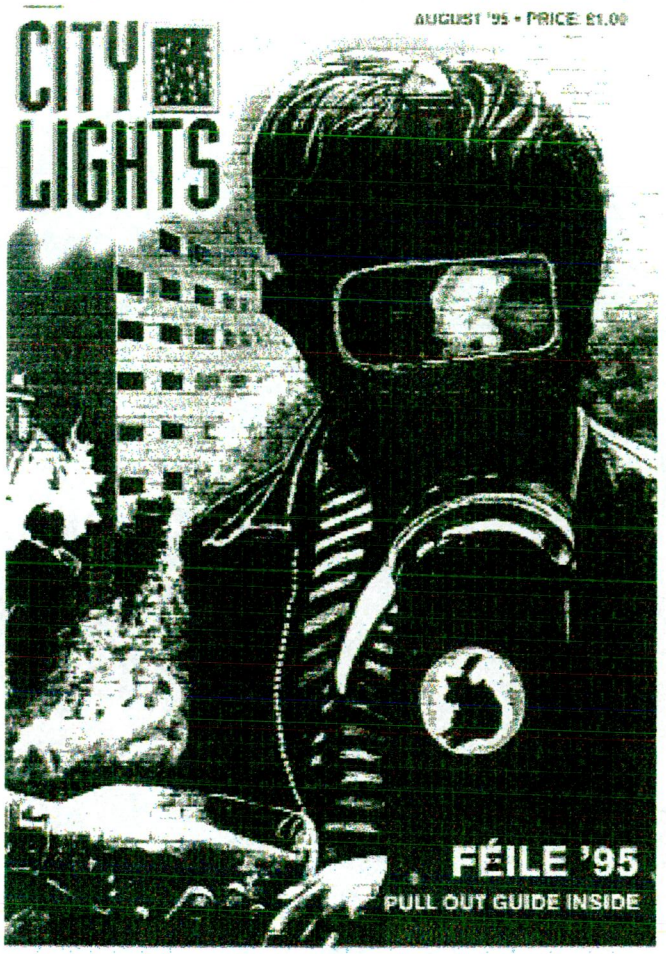
Outside of the artistic community attitudes towards the murals often define political affiliations "Marvellous" (*Irish News,* 1990) was how one Sinn Fein organiser described them. "People have criticised the murals for showing the trappings of violence but on the Falls Road the only people you see daily wearing uniforms and carrying guns are the British Army. You cannot paint roses and flowers on walls were people in armoured cars go past – reality has to be shown". However, not everyone is as enthusiastic about the political murals as Sinn Fein activists are. "Up market sectarian graffiti" (*Irish News,* 1990) was how Mary McMahon of the Workers Party described them. Father Dennis Faul has often denounced the political paintings of both communities, arguing that they serve only to "create fear, they create distrust and instill a sense that it is alright to kill" (*Irish News,* 1991). The Catholic church has been one of the biggest opponents of Republican muralists, often taking an active role in painting over murals – "they actually came out in Anderstown and painted over the murals with black paint" (G K, int.).

Tommy and Gerard both told me that they had always been supported by their local communities when painting a mural. Gerard was indignant when I mentioned some of the criticism that had been levelled at Republican murals by people like Alex Attwood (SDLP) who believed that political murals "glorified violence" (*Irish News*, 1990)."Why should we accept him? Who is he? What is he?, what did he ever do for us? Except sit with the RUC and plan how to defeat the Republican struggle" (G K, int.) Nationalist murals have become highly vulnerable casualties in the propaganda war that is fought out at street level in working class Republican areas. Gerard has witnessed the destruction of many of his paintings at the hands of the security forces. He has been threatened and hassled in the course of his work yet remains pragmatic and philosophical in the face of intimidation. Ironically, he feels "complimented" when his murals are defaced, seeing it as proof of the success his murals have in conveying an anti-British view point. He also believes that the destruction of Republican murals have a counter productive effect:

> when you are patching up a mural and people come along – tourists or TV crews or reporters and when they ask you what you are doing? And you tell them that you are repairing a mural destroyed by the British army and the RUC, the so-called peace keepers. So it is counterproductive. (G.K, int).

The level of success that Tommy's murals have achieved is highlighted by the amount of media exposure they have received. Newspapers and television crews have used their images on a regular basis (a recent example is the front cover of the *Irish News* during the controversy that surrounded the Apprentice Boy's wish to march around Derry's walls, Aug 26th 1996, see also ch. 3). The affection with which Tommy's work is held within the Nationalist community is reflected in the sales of posters, tee-shirts and other memorabilia that are adorned with images of his murals and are sold in many shops and market stalls around Derry. A caption on the front of the *Derry Journal,* as the Bogside mural was nearing completion, expressed its approval of the work being done by the local born muralist. It read "Free Derry Corner with its new look" (*Derry Journal*, Aug 1994). Tommy's murals are valued by the people in whose areas his paintings are situated, and indeed, it may be said, his murals have become important accessories for the urban decoration of Derry' Nationalist ghettos.

An example of a local Derry publication that has used Tommy's Bloody Sunday mural on their front cover [plate 12].



Local Derry publications that have used Tommy's Battle of the Bogside mural on their front covers [plates 13].

Chapter 3

Contemporary Murals

In this final chapter I shall look at some of the most important murals that were on display in Belfast and Derry during the months of October 95 and August 96. The photographs were taken during a time of political upheaval and change. It was a period that witnessed the breakdown of the IRA cease-fire and mounting tension between the two communities over the issue of consent and the right to march. I will analyse how political graffiti has evolved into a sophisticated form of visual communication that employs graphic devices like logos and sound bites in order to exploit an image hungry media. Finally, I shall look at how one community in Derry used the medium of the mural to respond to specific events that were taking place as a result of the Loyalist marching season.

The Versatility of Murals

The function served by political murals is both internal and external – they are directed at the communities in whose areas they are painted in as well as communicating a message to an outside world. The Republican movement uses murals and graffiti quite consciously in this way. What makes murals a particularly effective form of propaganda is that they are highly photogenic. News reporters and T.V. crews use them as a backdrop for their coverage of events that have taken place in the Nationalist ghettos of Belfast and Derry. These pictures and images are then circulated around the world thus allowing the Republican movement access to an international audience.The success of Republican murals also rests partly, I believe, in their versatility. They are easily and inexpensively adapted to respond to unfolding events.

Professional Graffiti and Quasi Murals

During the time I spent documenting the Republican murals of Belfast and Derry I noticed an absence of what I shall call "spontaneous graffiti". By this I refer to the painting of Republican slogans and graffiti by individuals who act in a purely random manner. Instead there was a proliferation of stencilled slogans more akin to the devices employed by advertisers who use short, catchy phrases in which to convey a message. "Demilitarise Now", "Disband the RUC", "25 Years – Time for Peace, Time to Go"and "Keep Ireland Tidy, Brits Out" (plate 1 – 4) were the most popular of the slogans. They were used in conjunction with larger murals or were painted on boards or walls without any accompanying image.

This type of graffiti serves to create an identity and continuity with the issues that are relevant to the Republican movement. Their function is similar to that of a catchphrase of a successful product or company – the issues articulated become instantly recognisable. By creating an identity that projects a consensus of ideals, the Republican position is expressed in a unified and consistent way. Thus Republican strongholds, whether they are situated in rural or urban areas, can project a single ideology. Continuity of expression has also been applied to quasi murals. Here slogans such as "Disband the RUC" are accompanied by a painting (plate 5) or as a simplified logo-type illustration (plate 6) which communicates the view that the RUC is a sectarian police force. Such quasi-murals have the advantage of being portable, allowing them to be painted at home and then transported to the relevant location.

Robert Ballagh, a Dublin-based artist and graphic designer, can be credited with providing the inspiration for this form of "professional graffiti". The logo he designed during the 1994 cease-fire, "Time for Peace, Time to Go" and his Slan Abhaile illustration (plates 7 and 8) featuring departing soldiers became enormously popular, being reproduced on many Northern Gables: "Here I refer to the logo designed for the cease-fire "Time for Peace, Time to Go" which seemed to feature, last September and August in almost every news item on the IRA cease-fire" (*Circa.*, 1994, p.22)

Demilitarise Now stencilled graffiti and Time To Go logo [plate 1] (logo designed by Robert Ballagh).

Stencilled slogan calling on the RUC to disband [plate 2].

Poster with disband the RUC logo and stylised RUC illustration [plate 3].

Keep Ireland Tidy stencilled image and slogan, note the integration of existing symbol with slogan [plate 4].

Portable mural painted on boards [plate 5], note how mural uses The Disband the RUC slogan.

Portable mural painted on boards [plate 6], note how mural uses The Disband the RUC slogan and logo type illustration similar to poster in plate 3.

Slan Abhaile mural [plate 7].
image copied from a Robert Ballagh illustration.

Mural based on the Slan Abhaile theme [plate 8].
Note also the issues on display in the circular images (release prisoners, end partition and RUC collusion). Also note background image of older murals painted on Whiterock road.

25 Years of Resistance Mural

In Republican areas of Belfast and Derry certain walls and gable ends of houses have a strategic importance because of their location and accessibility to a passing public. One of the best examples of the versatility of murals can be seen in the painting done in the Beechmount area of the Falls Road (plates 9-11). Painted in August 1994 to commemorate the beginning of the troubles, plate 9 depicts a scene that has a theme common to Republican murals painted during the time of the cease-fire. Against a burnt out urban landscape, armed and masked soldiers are confronted with the passive resistance of two women who are banging bin lids on the ground (a device used in Republican areas to warn people of the Army's presence in the area). The image depicts the Army as the villains of the piece, their faces hidden behind gas-masks and helmets makes them appear sinister and threatening. Accompanying the image is the Robert Ballagh designed "Time for Peace" logo and a demand for "Demilitarisation Now".

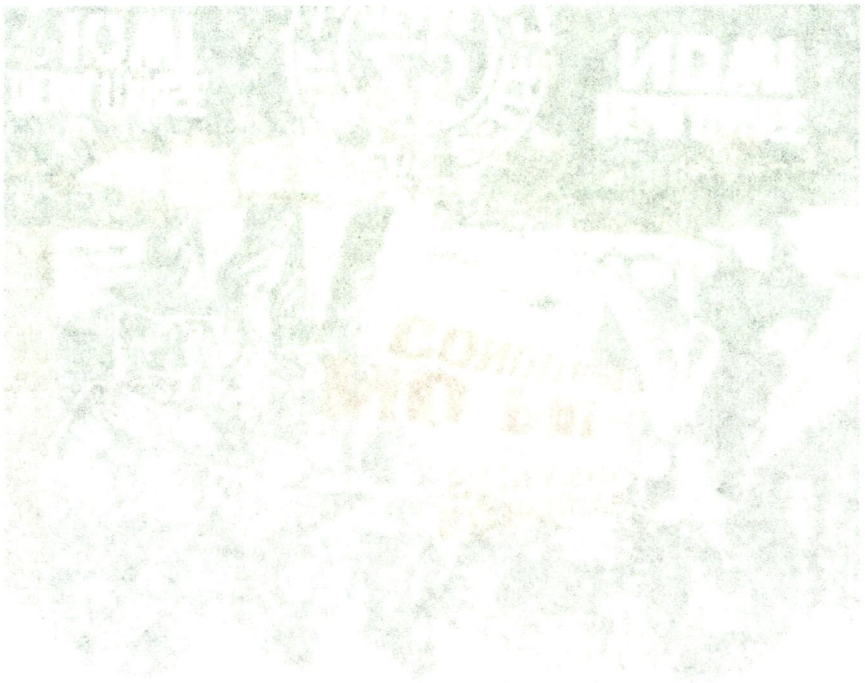
During the visit to Northern Ireland by President Clinton in November 1995 the mural was temporary replaced by another painting that had a greater relevance to this event. The new mural was painted on wooden boards and placed over the existing painting (plate 10). The message of the mural is clear – the ideals cherished by President Lincoln, that are founded on the principles of justice and liberty, are the same rights demanded and fought for by Irish Republicans. The mural has been adapted and designed for US public consumption. By targeting one specific event (the visit of President Clinton), the Republican movement, through the medium of the political mural, were able to exploit the mass media's coverage of the occasion in order to convey its own ideology.

Soon after the Clinton visit the Lincoln mural was taken down and the original painting was left on display. The breakdown of the IRA's cease-fire witnessed a further change to the mural (plate 11). Stencilled on to the existing image were a couple of short, punchy sound bites that responded to the British insistence on decommissioning while at the same time alluded to the cause of the conflict (Unionist rule as symbolised by the Stormont Government). Under the title of the mural was added the warning that the Republican movement were able and willing to continue their struggle for another 25 years if needs be. By adding 11 words of text, the mural has been changed completely. It has been modified and brought up to date in order to respond to current events and it is able to convey with complete clarity the Republican position.

25 Years of Resistance Mural [plate 9].
Note old style Army uniforms and gas masks worn by soldiers.

Temporary mural designed for visit of President Clinton [plate 10].
Note how the mural has been painted on wooden boards.

Modified 25 Years of Resistance Mural [plate 11].



The Modification of Existing Murals

The modification of existing murals is a favourite tactic employed by Republican muralists. If we examine the detail of Tommy Kelly's petrol bomb mural in plate 12 we can see the youth wears a badge that shows a map of partitioned Ireland. Placed over the image is a green saoirse ribbon (worn by Republicans in support of the prisoners). The circular badge in the painting remains true to the Limpkin image but if we look at an earlier photograph of the same mural we can see that it has been changed. In place of the original painting was placed an anti RUC logo (plate 13) that was painted on a separate wooden board and placed over the existing image. This was done during the months of the cease fire (August 1994 – February 1995) and was part of an orchestrated campaign by Republicans aimed at highlighting Nationalist discontent towards the RUC (see also plates 1 – 4). After a number of months the sign was taken down and the original badge of the mural was left on display. At a later date a green saiorse ribbon was attached to the mural in order to highlight another important Republican issue – the demand for the release of political prisoners. These small modifications to the established mural allow current issues to be addressed while at the same time commemorating an event such as the Battle of the Bogside. A similar way of working has been used on the 25 Years of Resistance mural (plates 9-11).

Detail of Petrol Bomb mural showing badge with map of Ireland [plate 12]. Note Saoirse Ribbon pinned to badge.

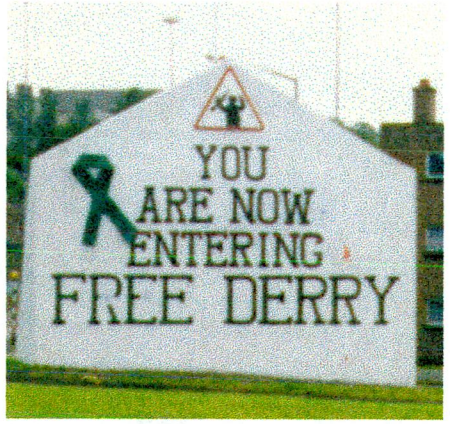
Detail of Petrol Bomb mural showing anti RUC sign [plate 13].

Besides the Petrol Bomb mural is "Free Derry Corner" (plate 14) , first painted in January 1968, 12 years before the mural traditional began in Nationalist areas. The wall was then the gable end of a house but is now a free standing structure that serves as a meeting place for parades and marches (notice as well the saoirse ribbon and sign showing an IRA volunteer). The opposite side of Free Derry corner faces the Bogside and unlike the front it is being constantly changed in order to communicate events and issues relevant to the local people of the area. Plate 15 shows a picture taken in 1994 and advertises a "Celebration of Resistance" march that is to take place in Belfast. The more recent photograph (plate 16) taken in June 1996, shows the wall now adorned with the Sinn Fein motif against a map of Ireland with the accompanying slogan, "Vote for Peace". Free Derry Corner is an excellent example of murals being directed both inwardly at a local audience (plates 15-16) and outwardly at a public who may be passing through the area (plate 14).

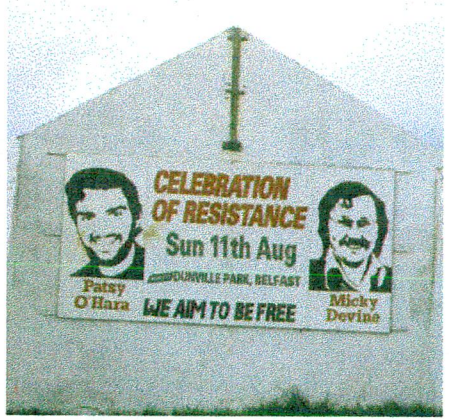
Republicans have also applied the technique of modifying an image on billboards and posters that were originally designed to draw support away from the paramilitaries. A recent example is shown by Bill Rolsten in his book *Drawing Support 2* (plate 17). The poster taps into a local sectarian myth that Protestant and Catholics can be distinguished by the space between their eyes. The poster showed a close up of a face with the distance measured . The accompanying slogan was, "if you catch yourself thinking like a bigot, catch yourself on". Republicans replaced the words "catch yourself on" and inserted the caption "join the RUC".

Another example of this form of image manipulation can be seen on the painted boards displayed on the Falls Road (see plate 18). Here the muralist has used the fable of the wolf in sheeps clothing as a warning about how Ulster television reports the activities of the RUC. On display is an illustration of a wolf wearing an RUC officers hat. The accompanying text advertises that: "the wolf in sheeps clothing is coming soon to RUC TV". The "R" and the "C" of RUC have been integrated into the Ulster Television logo so as to convey the view that the station is pro Unionist and therefore anti Nationalist.

The UTV logo is an identity that receives a great deal of public exposure and is well known to the people of Northern Ireland. It features throughout Ulster Television's television schedule and is the recognised identity of the local news programme broadcast every evening on UTV

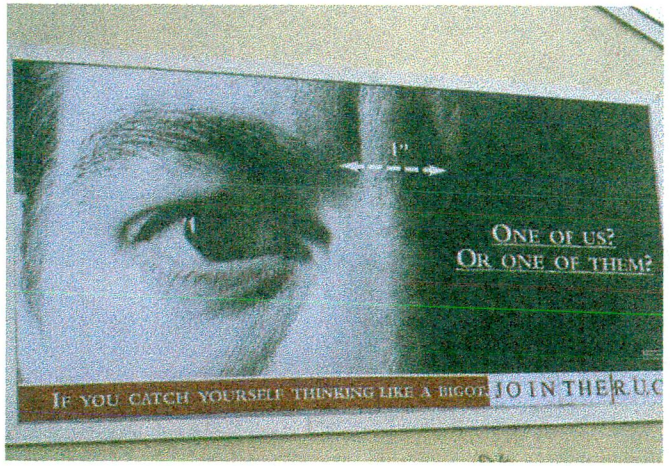


Front of Free Derry Corner [plate 14]
Note Saoirse Ribbon and sign with IRA Volunteer.



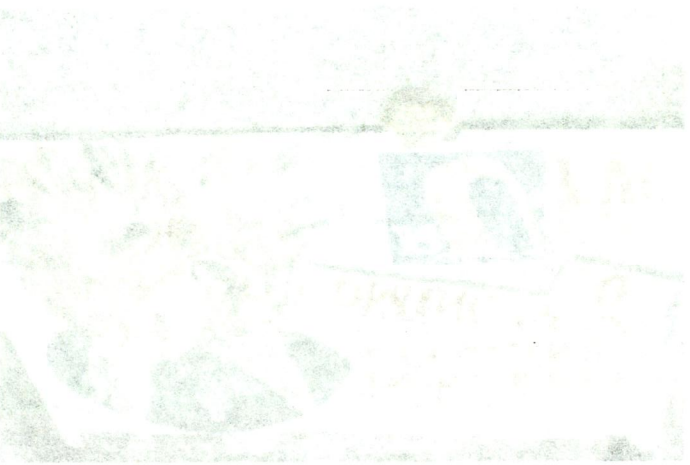
Back of Free Derry Corner [plate 15].
Bill-board mural advertising Republican march.

Back of Free Derry Corner [plate 16].
Sinn Fein Election Mural .



Poster erected by Community Relations Council [plate 17].
Note how Republicans have manipulated the posters message.

Quasi-type-Mural warning of UTV television coverage [plate 18].
Note Integration of existing UTV logo with R and C of RUC.



at six o'clock. The logo accompanies advertising campaigns run by Ulster Television and large bill boards throughout Belfast combine the logo with the slogan "UTV is your TV". The central theme of the campaign is that UTV is a television company that is acceptable to both communities and the logo is an integral part of the company's marketing strategy. The campaign's success has been recognised by Republicans and the mural in plate 18 is their response. The mural works in much the same way as the advertising billboards commonly used by companies like UTV. It uses a landscape format and is painted on a wooden board which has then been attached to a building that faces a busy road. The mural sets out to expose UTV's claim to be an impartial television station by highlighting an important hidden agenda of the company – tacit support for the security forces through its reporting of news events. It is an example of the muralist using advertising devices commonly used by designers and PR companies and is further proof of the increasing sophistication of Republican murals.

The Prisoners' Issue

A major theme of Republican murals, both during and after the cease-fire was the demand for the release of all political prisoners (see plates 19-22). Frequently local areas listed their own political prisoners and the green saoirse ribbon was adopted as a unifying motif. The ribbon was worn by people who claimed solidarity with the prisoner's cause and the image came to symbolise the importance of the issue as a pre-requisite to peace. The painting of the dove and the barbed wire (plate 19) dates back to the first Republican murals painted during the 1981 Hunger Strike. The only direct reference to the prisoners is the printing of their names under the green saoirse ribbons – the symbolism of the dove and barbed wire are all that is needed in order to convey the prisoner's demands.

Also using this theme were commemorative murals done in remembrance of the 1981 Hunger Strike (plate 20). Most of the murals displayed portraits of Bobby Sands (plate 21) who was the spokes person for the prisoners at the time and was the first person to die on Hunger Strike. These type of murals not only remind the viewer of that event – they also serve to reinforce the importance of the prisoners' issue to the Republican movement.

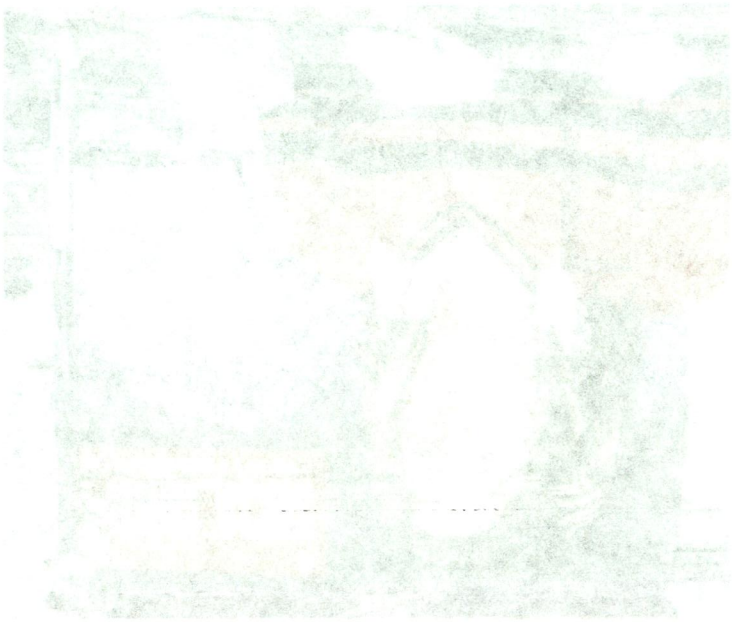
Mural demanding release of Republican prisoners [plate 19].
Note the image of the dove and Barbed wire that dates from 1981
Hunger Strike Murals.

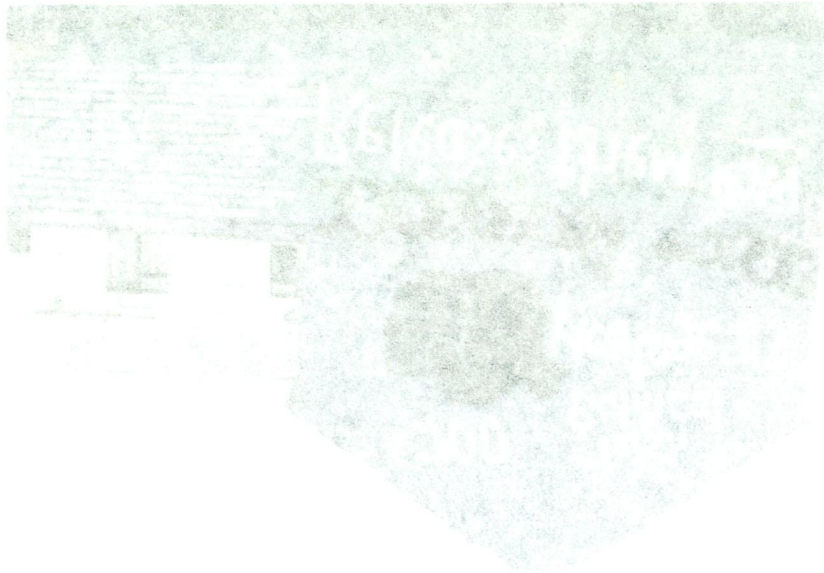
The versatility of murals have given the Republican Movement an invaluable outlet in which to articulate their demands and aspirations. This was especially important in the changed political climate brought about by the cease-fire. The ultimate Republican aim was still the achievement of a unified Ireland but in the meantime more immediate concerns were being expressed. Republican murals demanded a British Army withdrawal and the disbandment of the RUC. The integration of current issues with established murals, the increasing use of portable quasi murals and the development of Republican catchphrases and sound bites have allowed the street gables and walls of the Nationalist areas of Northern Ireland to articulate a range of demands in a unified and consistent way.

Mural commemorating 1981 Hunger Strike [plate 20].
Note the ten portraits of the prisoners who died on Hunger Strike produced in the shape of a 'H' symbolising the H Block prison wings of the Maze prison.

Mural commemorating the death of Bobby Sands [plate 21].

Mural demanding the release of political prisoners [plate 22]. Note integration of dove symbol and fist breaking chain.





A Day in Derry, 7th of August 1997

The Background to Events

The Loyalist marching season takes place during the summer months, beginning in early May and continuing right through until September. The high point of Protestant – Unionist celebrations is the Twelfth of July when they commemorate the victory of the Protestant forces of William of Orange over the Catholic forces of James the Second in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. Every year on the twelfth of July the Protestant Orange Order marches in strength in the cities and towns throughout Northern Ireland, demanding the "right to march where they will, even – or especially - if Catholics protest" (Rolsten, 1987, p.8).

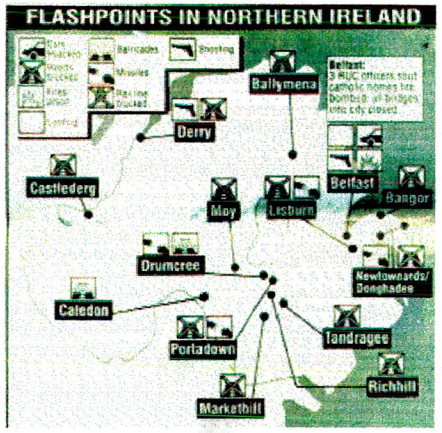
During the summer of 1996 the issue of consent and the right of Orange marchers to parade through Nationalist areas was an issue that brought both communities to the brink of all out sectarian conflict. The events of Drumcree, Portadown Co Armagh, were to prove the catalyst for this confrontation. Residents of the Catholic Garvahy Road refused to allow the marchers parade through their area without first being consulted. The RUC, after initially banning the parade, were forced in the face of mounting civil disorder by Loyalist protesters throughout the North, to capitulate to the demands of the marchers (see map on plate 23). The outrage felt by many Nationalists throughout Ireland was articulated by a Sunday Tribune editorial (Sunday 11th of August) that described the ramifications of Drumcree in the following way:

> Anyone who forgot, tried to forgive, or is to young too remember Bloody Sunday when paratroopers killed 13 men, will have clenched their fists and wanted revenge at the sight of a Northern Ireland police force vigorously "subduing" what had been a peaceful protest.
>
> (*Sunday Tribune*, 1996, August 11th).

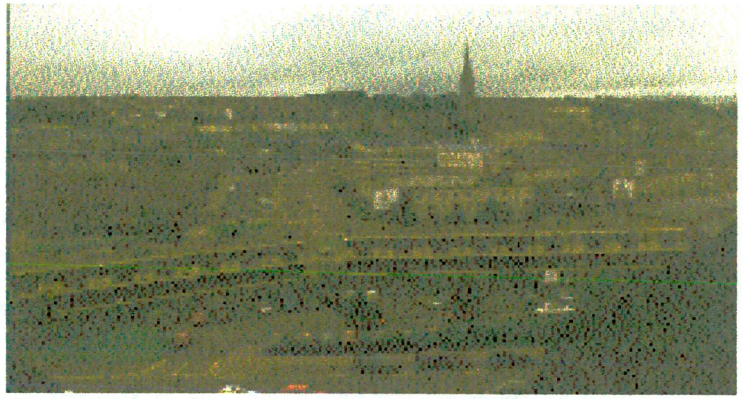
Nationalist anger manifested itself on the streets of the towns and cities of Northern Ireland. In Derry especially, there were 3 nights of continuous rioting that caused thousands of pounds worth of damage and left one protester dead. Another contentious parade was forced through the Nationalist Lower Ormeau Road, Belfast and it was against this background that the residents of the Bogside prepared themselves for the annual Apprentices Boy's march that was due to take place in the city on the 10th of August. The events of Drumcree and the Ormeau Road, gave the march a much greater significance, especially since the parade route would follow a stretch of the recently re-opened Derry walls. This would mean the marchers would pass close to the Bogside (a similar situation in 1969 had been the spark that resulted in the Battle of the Bogside – see chapter 2) .

In the weeks leading up to the parade I arranged to meet Tommy Kelly for the second time and during the day I spent in Derry I was able to document and record how the residents of the Bogside were responding to the unfolding events through the medium of the political mural. To appreciate this more fully, it is perhaps important to try and understand the geographical makeup of the area. The photographs in plates 24 and 25 show how close the Bogside is to the route that would have been taken by the marchers. The flats in Plate 24 have utilised their close proximity to the parade in order to spell out, literally, the issue at stake. "No Sectarian Marches" has been written on each of the balconies that would face the marchers. The unambiguous message of the graffiti is backed up by the two murals in the distance that reinforce Nationalist opposition to the parade.

Plate 26 shows Tommy and two of his fellow muralists at work on a half-finished painting that is being done specifically for this event (they were rushing to complete the painting in time for a Nationalist counter demonstration that was to have taken place on the Friday the 9 of August). The mural depicts two stylised RUC men, one in riot gear battening an unarmed protester. In the finished painting, the figure on the right will be shown wearing an Orange sash. The style of the image (copied from a socialist magazine) is simple enough to be painted quickly (Tommy explained to me that it would not have been his first choice of image but because of the short



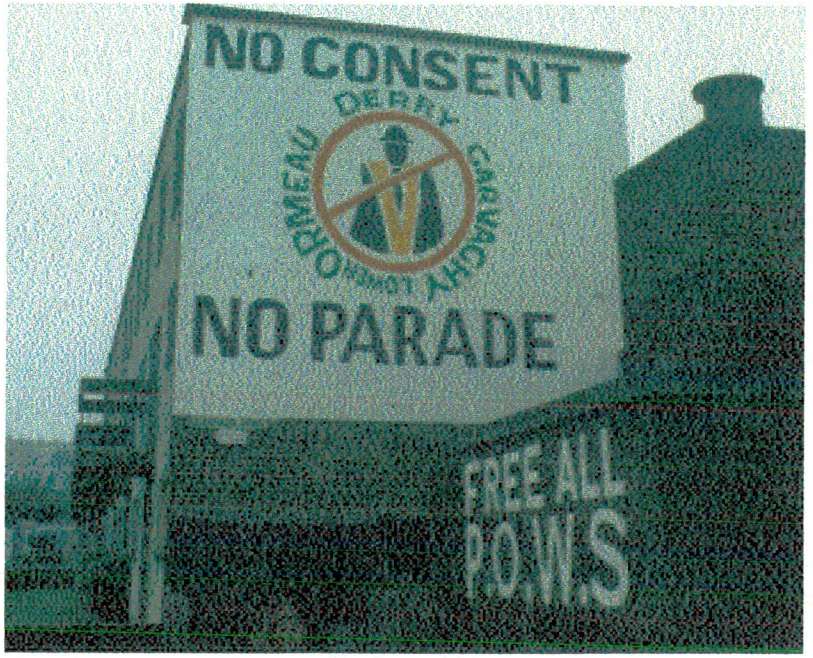
Map showing flash points of trouble during Drumcree stand off [plate 23].



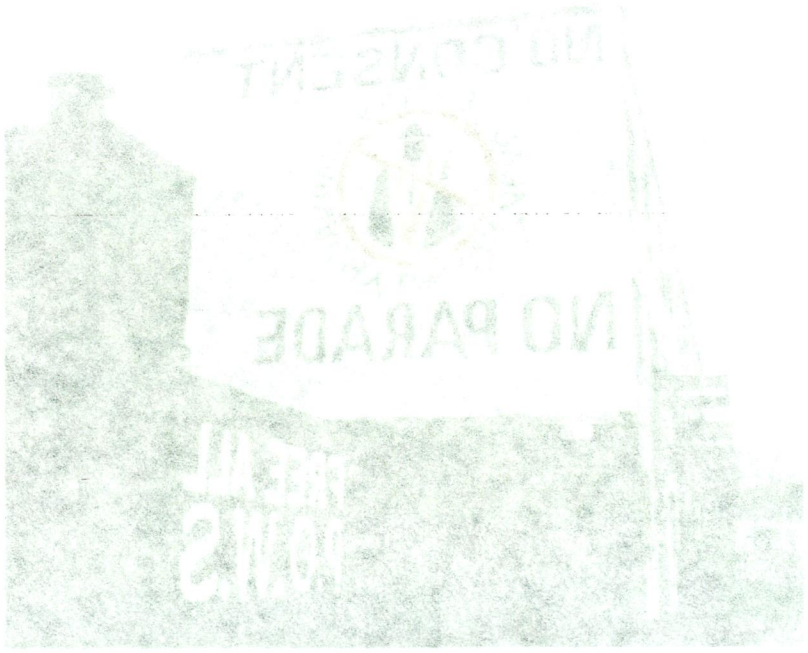
Photograph showing proximity of Bogside to Route of march [plate 24].
Note murals in background [plates 26–27].

Photograph showing Free Derry Corner from
city walls [plate 25].

Photograph showing mural protesting against
proposed Apprentice Boys march [plate 26].



No consent/no parade mural [plate 27].
Note logo-type illustration of Orange marcher.


NO PARADE

time span involved he had no time to come up with his own design). Accompanying the image was the statement that told us that "nothing had changed" – the RUC therefore, is symptomatic of an irreformable State that is pro-unionist and anti Catholic. The theme of the painting alludes to the actions of the RUC rather than highlighting any one specific event such as Drumcree and the message of the mural is that such events have an historical context – Nationalist oppression is as prevalent now as it ever was.

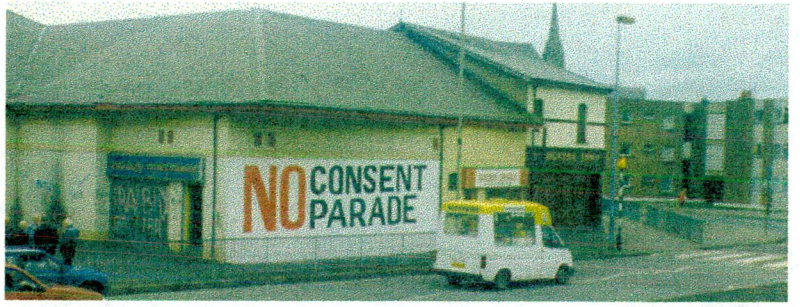
Four words spell out Nationalist objections to Orange marches – "No Consent, No Parade". It is a slogan that came to prominence as a result of the parades issue and was used throughout the Nationalist areas of the North . The mural in plate 27 combines this slogan with a logo-type illustration (similar to the paintings in plates 5-6). Enclosed in a red circle with a line through it is painted the stylised figure of an Orange marcher. The two earlier parades at Garvahy and the Ormeau Road are remembered with Derry placed on top of the circle in order to highlight the cycle of controversial marches. Like the stencilled graffiti and anti RUC motifs of the Belfast paintings, the image has been simplified, yet visually it is effective in conveying its message. The design of the mural employs a fundamental principle used by architects and Graphic Designers – that less is equal to more.

Further along the Bogside the issue of consent has been highlighted using a painting that employs a purely typographical arrangement (plate 28). The large "NO" has been painted in red so that even when read on its own it is able to articulate Nationalist opposition to Loyalist parades while also specifying the issue of consent. Supporting such murals were homemade banners made by local residents in an ad-hoc way in order to express their own personal opinion of the march (plate 29). What is interesting about these banners is that they project a continuity of objection by the way in which they are designed. They use the same slogans and apply a similar typographical arrangement in the layout of their banners to that of the newly painted "No Consent" murals (note, for example, the large "No" written in red, plates 28 – 29).

What these photographs show is a how a Nationalist community like the Bogside is able to use murals for a specific purpose or event. It is evidence of the popularity of murals in the political culture of Catholic/Nationalist ghettos. They are, as Jeffrey A Sluka tells us "the product of repetitive organised group activity for a specific purpose" (Sluka, 1992, 213). Such murals employ graphic devices as a form of political expression, they are an informal means of mobilising the local community while at the same time "countering the image of stability and acceptance generated by the normal appearance of much of the urban landscape" (Sluka, 1992, 213). They serve to act as a "political richter scale" (T K, int.), warning us of the possibilities of future conflict.

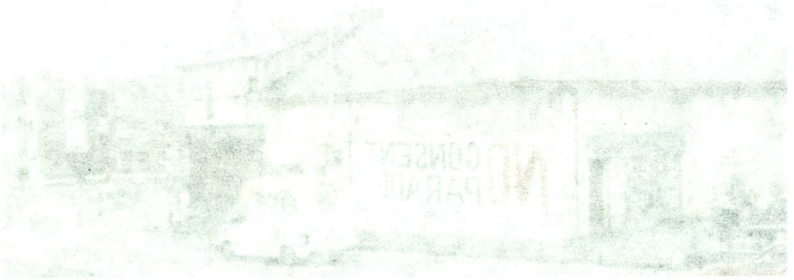
Epilogue

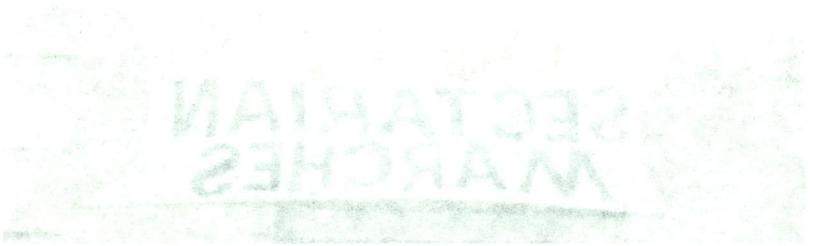
As I prepared to leave the Bogside on that Wednesday evening it became obvious that something quite important was taking place. It soon transpired that the RUC and British army had taken the decision to block of the disputed section of the walls over looking the Bogside. The tension, that had been prevalent throughout the day began to dissipate. The inevitable confrontation with the Loyalist marches and RUC had been postponed for another day.



No consent no parade mural [plate 28].
Note mural uses a typographical arrangement devoid of any accompanying image.

No sectarian marches banner [plate 29].





Conclusion

Throughout the twenty seven years of conflict that Northern Ireland has experienced, the Republican movement has been denied access to the favoured channels of communication. To cite Liz Curtis again, the media's news coverage of the troubles is "pro-British and generally pro-Unionist" (Curtis, 1984, p 25). The dissemination of the media's reporting of events is a vital element in the north's propaganda war. The struggle for the hearts and minds of the local inhabitants is a fundamental aspect of the counter-insurgency battle and is won or lost at local level. The Republican movement recognises the importance of the propaganda war that "raises the Nationalist people's morale, puts Ireland on the world stage and demoralises the British government and its forces" (Sluka, 1996, p 216.). Political wall murals have become particularly important in the Catholic ghettos of Belfast and Derry. They attempt to counter the image of stability and acceptance generated by much of the urban landscape and are a constant reminder of Nationalist resistance.

Katie Lumsden believes that the political murals of both communities are "representative of the hatred and division that has made Northern Ireland famous" (Lumsden, 1995, p.14). I believe that this is an over simplification of the subject. It is doubtful if any political conflict in the world can be reduced to the simple stereotyping of sectarianism. The north's political murals are representative of more than just the religious differences that divide Catholic and Protestant communities. While it is true that nearly all of the images produced by Nationalist muralists are intrinsically linked to the volatile conundrum of Northern politics they are also the result of the individual interpretation of events by the artists themselves. The murals of Gerard Kelly and Tommy Kelly have addressed a wide range of issues and their work plays a vital role in mobilising support within the politically literate communities of the north's urban ghettos. Nationalist mural art has evolved into a sophisticated visual syntax, capable of articulating Republican aspirations and ideology. The work produced by artists like Tommy and Gerard represent the views of a large section of the north's Nationalist community and to dismiss what they have to say in the pretext that what they produce is mere sectarian graffiti reflects, I believe, a failure to grasp the complexities of the conflict that has, and is taking place there.

Nationalist mural art has come a long way from the spontaneous works of the early 1980s. Political activists like Tommy Kelly and Gerard Kelly must work in a hostile and sometimes dangerous environment. Gerard has had to adapt and simplify the content of his work in order to make his murals more resistant to attacks by the security forces. Both artists are aware that they are regarded as legitimate targets by Loyalist paramilitaries and are constantly harassed in the course of their work by the RUC and British army. I would argue that the design behind many contemporary murals have a degree of professionalism consistent with the work produced by any trained graphic designer. The simplifying of images, the increasing use of logo type illustrations, the juxtaposing and manipulating of existing source material and the adapting of established murals is evidence of how sophisticated Republican murals have now become. The images produced are all the more remarkable when we consider the lack of formal artistic training, funding and equipment available to the muralists. It is an area of northern political mural art that has been ascribed very little in the way of serious academic research yet the images produced by both communities remain a unique phenomenon. What I hope this thesis has been able to show is the thought process behind some of the most visually effective Republican murals. The gable images that are prominent in the Nationalist areas of Belfast and Derry are the result of a sophisticated design process that has evolved at the street level of the ghetto. Republican murals express the political alienation felt by many working class Catholic communities within Northern Ireland. They have proved successful in mobilising support within local communities and are an "effective means of resistance, political socialisation, education and communication" (Sluka, 1992, p.191).

It is also important to consider the differing motivations behind the work produced by Gerard Kelly and Tommy Kelly. While both artists share a similar back ground and have many similarities in their political outlook there are some fundamental differences in how they approach the painting of murals. Gerard Kelly sees the purpose of his work as a means by which the Republican movement can respond to British propaganda and he believes that his political murals have achieved a high level of success in articulating Nationalist objectives. Tommy also sees the role of the political mural as a form of political agitation yet he is less concerned with promoting an overtly Republican agenda. Through his murals, he has attempted to refect the issues and concerns that are important to his community. It is true that commemorative paintings like the ones done for Bloody Sunday and the Battle of the Bogside have a Republican connection in that they were significant events that had a major effect in the shaping of the

troubles. They are also a striking visual reminder to how traumatising the violence of the past thirty years have been on communities like the Bogside and are symbolic of a society still at war with itself.

My thesis has attempted to analyse some important differences that distinguish Belfast and Derry. The differing levels of polarisation that affect the two communities in both cities is reflected in the fact that Tommy was able to paint murals in a Loyalist area of Derry. It is highly unlikely that a similar thing could take place in Belfast, a result I believe, of the differing demographical differences that make up both cities. The "patch work" of Loyalist and Nationalist areas that interface on each other in the working class districts of Belfast has facilitated the high level of sectarian violence that has taken place there to a much greater level than that in Derry. The differing levels of violence experienced by the Nationalist communities of both cities is reflected in how both Tommy and Gerard see the possibilities of future cross community ventures (see Ch.2, p. 16). The death threats Tommy received from Loyalist paramilitaries after painting The Battle of the Bogside mural also illustrates how alienated both communities are from one another and how fragile any form of cross community co-operation is.

Bill Rolsten has described the painting of political murals as a way in which a political message is written "larger than life on local walls for all to see and comprehend" (Rolsten p.7). Murals, he contends, are political propaganda not art and to a certain degree he is right. Most Nationalist wall paintings are expressions of political aspirations yet the term "political propaganda" is an over generalisation of an ever evolving form of visual expression. The approach and interpretations of muralists like Tommy and Gerard must be recognised and the thought process behind individual murals should be looked at more closely. The design of the Russian Constructivist posters of the 1920s and' 30s have been ascribed a degree of artistic merit that is clearly absent from any analysis of northern mural art yet both share many similarities. Russian Constructivist posters used a combination of collaged imagery and innovative typography to mobilise people politically. Paintings like Tommy Kelly's Bloody Sunday mural (ch2, Plate 9) and Gerard Kelly's anti-censorship mural (ch1, Plate 7) use similar elements such as the collaging and simplifying of images in order to communicate their message effectively. The use of logo type quasi murals (ch.3, Plates 6 and 27) and typographical murals (ch.3, Plate 28) are also examples of how Republican murals are evolving and it is important to recognise that Nationalist mural art is a constantly developing phenomenon. To base any analysis of them on the same criteria as earlier murals is a major failing of much of the existing research.

Regardless of how lightly the academic world views Northern Ireland's political wall paintings, it is clear that the British Army sees them as a threat. There is evidence that the destruction of Republican wall murals has been systematic rather that the result of isolated incidents by individual soldiers. Roger Faligot, whose book on counter insurgency in Northern Ireland, *Britain's Military in Northern Ireland: The Kitson experiment,* has claimed that the army has destroyed murals in an effort to "depoliticise" the urban environment of the Catholic ghetto.

During the early months of the Provisional IRA's ceasefire of 1994 Republican murals expressed the assurance and confidence that comes with the resolution of a conflict. Murals addressed important conditions for peace with a belief that accompanies the silencing of weapons and the prospect of a negotiated settlement. Loyalist paintings by contrast, expressed defiance at the perceived Nationalist threat to their status within the Union – "Prepared for peace, ready for war" articulated the Loyalist reaction to the ceasefire.

Now, over two years later, Northern Ireland faces an even more uncertain future with both communities as deeply divided as ever and Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries on the verge of returning to all out conflict. The content of Republican and Loyalist murals are "inextricably linked" (Lumsden, 1995, p.19) to the political events that are happening on the ground. They act as a "political richter scale" (T.K, int), devoid of the vernacular double speak of politicians and diplomats. It is my belief that they provide us with an insight into the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the people who are closest to the conflict and who have most to lose. It may be prudent therefore, for those wishing to see any settlement of the northern troubles to examine more carefully their content, perhaps giving us as they do, the clearest glimpse possible of an uncertain future.

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