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By Colm Laighneach

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and  
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of  
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## INTRODUCTION

As the Mexican muralists lent their skills to the revolution of 1920, the Northern Ireland state was being born out of partition and a failed struggle for National self-determination.

The names of the Mexican muralists are still on the lips of art commentators and historians; Diego Rivera, Jose Orozco, and David Siqueiros are still internationally acclaimed. The mural painters of Northern Ireland are virtually anonymous and as yet their work is not considered fit to be compared with the high art of Ireland's so-called professional artists. It is true that Northern Ireland's mural artists were not trained artists, unlike Rivera and company, however, unlike Rivera the trained artists of Ireland have not committed themselves to politically debating their society, preferring instead to claim the diplomatic immunity of their studios and galleries.

It is not for this reason alone that Northern muralists have been ignored in history; the Mexican mural artists threw their lot in with a revolutionary movement that attempted to create a new society by building an identity of independence through a rediscovery of 'Indian' culture. In the same period in Ireland, this process had also been undertaken by poets, writers, and play-wrights of the cultural revival that was an integral part of the National independence struggle. The mural painters of Northern Ireland were not part of this struggle. They were instead engaged in what can only be described as a reactionary counter revolution to maintain sectarian privilege. As such they were isolated from the creative and cultural forces of their time, finding approval instead among the right wing conservative politicians and military officers. Had Rivera

## NOTES

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the atom. It is shown that the structure of the atom is determined by the laws of quantum mechanics, and that the laws of quantum mechanics are based on the principle of the conservation of energy.

2. In the second part of the paper, the author discusses the structure of the atom in more detail. He shows that the structure of the atom is determined by the laws of quantum mechanics, and that the laws of quantum mechanics are based on the principle of the conservation of energy.

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been compelled to oppose the revolution in Mexico and turned his skills to the support of Porfirio Diaz it seems likely that his work would have suffered a similar obscurity to that of the Unionist muralists.

Unionist muralists chose to create instead an alternative identity that I will argue is based on false notions of superiority and a political entity which was fundamentally flawed lacking the credibility and integrity of consensus that could sustain it. However this is a history of two parts, and in the other part it would be sixty years before a comparative phenomenon to that of Mexico occurred in Ireland. After the death by starvation of ten young republicans alternative mural painting in support of national independence erupted. These muralists had no difficulty linking their historic past with national liberation struggles elsewhere - Nicaragua, Palestine, or South Africa. Nor had they difficulty in presenting their efforts as part of an age-old struggle for national self-determination. Given the large repertoire at their disposal it was not then difficult to represent themselves visually.

But Ireland is not Mexico. The loyalist and republican murals are organically linked to political movements. Neither movement is in control of the state although each has its aspirations for the kind of state it desires. Murals are part of this process of definition, their function is mobilization. That mobilization takes place at local level but it is no less important for that. After all, although also fought out at the society and international levels it is at the local level that the battle for state legitimacy is waged daily. In the midst of this battle murals are a crucial factor in the politicisation of the community. Politically articulate murals simultaneously become expressions of and creators of community solidarity. Although it

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3. The third part is devoted to the case of a system of particles.

4. In the fourth part, we shall discuss the problem of the interaction of particles.

5. The fifth part is devoted to the case of a system of particles.

6. In the sixth part, we shall consider the case of a single particle.

7. The seventh part is devoted to the case of a system of particles.

8. In the eighth part, we shall discuss the problem of the interaction of particles.

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33. The thirty-third part is devoted to the case of a system of particles.

34. In the thirty-fourth part, we shall consider the case of a single particle.

would be too far-fetched to say that the propaganda war is won or lost at local level, there can be no denying the role the murals play as a crucial weapon.

Therefore, as mediators of the visual resources and disseminators of the central projects of their cultures, I will attempt to show how muralists of Northern Ireland play the ancient role of their culture's bard and perhaps more importantly show why they have used murals to do so.



1. The first part of the report is a general  
introduction to the subject of the study.  
2. The second part is a description of the  
methodology used in the study.  
3. The third part is a description of the  
results of the study.  
4. The fourth part is a discussion of the  
results and their implications.  
5. The fifth part is a conclusion and  
recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 1 : Northern Ireland, A Brief History**

Somebody described the north of Ireland as a psychosis under sedation, dormant but uncured.

Certainly for somebody travelling north from the relatively well adjusted society of Dublin and its smug self confidence, the manic nature of northern Ireland is brutally apparent. From every height, tall building, strategic location, stares the architecture of control and defence through the darkened slits of pillboxes and surveillance cameras. Helicopters hover, military patrols emerge and vanish, the whole existence is fraught with anxiety and anticipation of the unnatural calm shattering at the moment. As a traveller, visitor or voyeur to the north it is almost impossible not to stare at the physical manifestation of this insanity. We know that its impolite to point, so we pretend not to notice until, travelling on, and the mania begins to erupt in squints and ticks of flags buntings and graffiti till finally we reach the centre and the personality can no longer control itself. From every wall gable or piece of available surface screams the dreadful story of a society in deadly conflict. We are there in the front room of this two storey terraced dispute, no longer outside we are obliged to enter the debate.

In order to understand any society or cultural practices that emerge from that society I believe it is necessary to firstly examine its historical development both social and political. So it would, it seems be impossible to understand Northern Ireland or its practice of mural painting without going through this process.

Colonialism has impacted deeply on Ireland for more that 800 years. Largely this resulted from the needs of the neighbouring





island, Britain to expand. This expansion has been and continues as a process that has evolved and developed throughout this time.

Ironically Northern Ireland where colonialism remains most deeply rooted was the last and most resistant part of Ireland to colonisation. Only through a policy of plantation or placing of loyal 'settlers' from Scotland mostly was it possible to pacify Ulster. This was done by apparently native lands and redistributing them among the planted peoples. However as might be expected this policy was met with resistance and the Irish remained unruly, disputing, the sovereignty of the British crown in Ireland.

Classically the colonization of Ireland mirrors that of many other parts of the world. Having succeeded in militarily controlling the country Britain proceeded to dismantle the existing systems of laws, languages and beliefs in order that the colonial project of extraction and repatriation of anything that might be of use to the mother country might be made easier.

Colonialism from Sri Lanka to South Africa employs classically, difference or perceived difference in colour, race or religion using the division usually to set the minority in opposition to the majority in return for small favours.

In Ireland repression of the heresy of Roman Catholicism was the pretext on which relative favour could be shown to Protestant planters. Because of the unwillingness of the natives to conform, confrontation was inevitable. Traditionally Catholicism was linked to rebellion and resistance to the crown while Protestantism was linked to loyalty privileged and power setting a scene for sectarian conflict in the future.

This can be seen very clearly by the association of loyalism in folk memory with the 1690 battle of the Boyne which although a



part of the Jacobite Williamite wars disputing the throne of England, has come to be remembered as a victory over the threat of catholic authoritarian persecution although William the third was in fact allied in his endeavours with the pope!

Despite the promotion of sections against Catholics, Presbyterians also suffered in the hierarchy of religious/political privilege so much so that republicanism became a current theory among Presbyterians. They managed to unite in opposition in the 1798 revolution which was a dismal failure.

However the anti sectarian efforts of the United Irishman have not endured as a folk memory among their Presbyterian descendants. This may in part be due to the massive repression that the 1798 rebellion was met with. Indeed measures were quickly implemented to thwart any further collusion with separatism. The act of union between Great Britain & Ireland was enacted the Orange Order was legalized & encouraged and the residual penal laws affecting Presbyterians repealed.

From this time on all political affiliation on the island took the form of alliance or opposition to the union. The strength of the nationalist anti-union movement became such that by 1921 after a number of years of 'terrorism' Ireland was partitioned into two units.

The state of northern Ireland was unashamedly designed so that its boundaries could contain maximum geographical area that could be safely dominated by a unionist protestant majority. Unfortunately the state of Northern Ireland was forced to include nationalist/catholic minority within its boundaries. However unionist strove and succeeded in not sharing the benefits of their society with the nationalist 'captives', within the new state.





Discrimination and sectarianism hitherto, officially frowned upon, now became official. Such was the degree of institutionalized sectarianism that even the most cool observers could not help be impressed by the remarks of a visiting South African President Foster who was moved to say that he would exchange all of his anti-black security legislation for one paragraph of the northern Ireland special powers act.

The social, political and cultural exclusion of nationalist in Northern Ireland led eventually to a campaign for civil rights in the 1960's in pursuit of equality of treatment within the state. Unionism having built its state on notions of supremacist privilege and ascendancy was unable to concede to reform, treating civil right demands as an attack on the state. This led to anti-catholic programs followed by British military intervention in defence of Catholics, and 'order'. Eventually the I.R.A, which had been virtually non existent, re-emerged in a defensive role but quickly became radicalised to a belief that the sectarian state was irreformable.

Unsure of British intentions and having lost their parliament Unionism splintered into ultra unionist loyalism emerging in the shape of the U.D.A and U.F.F and pursuing an armed campaign against the nationalist community to stifle demands for an end to partition. For more than twenty five years the I.R.A fought a low intensity war against the British and their legal and extra legal surrogates.

In the run up to partition loyalists from working class East Belfast began painting wall murals of the battle of the Boyne, the first of these appearing in 1908. These traditionally appeared on or near the twelfth of July.

The twelfth of July had become the official day on which the

1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that a knowledge of the past is essential for a full understanding of the present and for the development of a sound policy for the future.

2. The second part of the paper discusses the role of the government in the development of the United States. It is argued that the government has played a crucial role in the development of the country, and that its actions have been guided by a set of principles that have been passed down from generation to generation.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the role of the individual in the development of the United States. It is argued that the individual has played a crucial role in the development of the country, and that his actions have been guided by a set of principles that have been passed down from generation to generation.

4. The fourth part of the paper discusses the role of the future in the development of the United States. It is argued that the future is a time of great opportunity, and that it is up to us to make the most of it.

5. The fifth part of the paper discusses the role of the present in the development of the United States. It is argued that the present is a time of great opportunity, and that it is up to us to make the most of it.

triumph of Unionism in its statehood took place. Unionist muralism was an important part of the celebration of the shared heritage of Unionism and Protestantism. To this extent muralism performed the role of writing large the symbols of the state, the status quo and conservatism.

However the shock that Unionism underwent in the face of civil rights demands and subsequent challenges from the I.R.A led to a lack of certainty about the security of union itself. The disbandment of the B Special, proroguing of Stormont and attempts by moderates to appease nationalists, shook the confidence and unity of the unionist alliance.

Correspondingly a decline in the number and upkeep of unionist murals was a phenomena of the sixties which continued till the eighties. However by then unionist murals & perhaps unionism itself had changed and the old icons of King Billy were to be replaced in time, by 'Billy's' as locally based as down Portadown.

Although traditionally the medium of radical and left learning movements, muralism in the north had in fact been carried on with the full imprimatur of the state. Opposition murals did not emerge until the 1980's for numerous reasons not least being that policing was the sole responsibility of the unionist community. Despite the dangers associated with shows of dissent such as the energy of emotions unleashed by the hungerstrikes of the 1980's a flurry of mural painting, republican and seditious, emerged in Belfast and Derry. Although, initially, it began as a response to the crisis of the moment, republican murals soon turned to the myriad of issues at the heart of nationalist opposition to the northern state.





## **CHAPTER 2 : FROM KING BILLY THE DEFENDER TO THE DEFENCE OF BILLY WRIGHT**

In the year 1690 the Protestant King William of Orange is said to have stopped the Catholic attempt to re-establish royal power in England by beating Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland and then occupying the English throne. His victory, it is said, guaranteed Protestant liberty rather than Catholic authoritarianism in both England and Ireland.

There are a number of uncomfortable facts however contradicting this myth. For example given the balance of political forces in western Europe at the time, it was Protestant William rather than Catholic James who had the pope's blessing in the battle.

Perhaps most significantly, William's success did not guarantee liberty for all Irish Protestants.. The fact is that despite the common enemy, the planters were themselves divided along class and religious lines. The gentry was for the most part Anglican, while the peasantry was Presbyterian. Anglicans feared the dissenting radicalism of the Presbyterians and attempted to ensure that Presbyterianism, if not suppressed, was at least politically curtailed. This fact more than any other led sections of the Presbyterian middle class to become a revolutionary force at the end of the century. Presbyterians found common cause with the Catholic peasantry in the United Irishmen revolution of 1798. The failure of that revolution paradoxically led to the emergence of a system where the Presbyterian middle class found the obstacles to their political and economic progress removed. The Act of Union in 1801, despite being a punishment for revolutionary activity, gave the middle class



the niche it sought. With the Act of Union, the basis existed for a cessation of old rivalries among the planters.

An alliance of the different Protestant classes provided advantages for each of the classes involved. Despite major differences of class, interest, ideology and politics, the alliance forged at the turn of the nineteenth century proved remarkably sturdy in the years that followed. The backbone of this alliance was the Orange Order.

Similarly, the symbols of unionist unity were not always nor equally shared by each of the classes participating in the alliance. As Loftus notes, the standard contemporary image of King William as heroic historical figure on horseback at the Battle of the Boyne originated in a painting by Benjamin West, first exhibited in 1780. The painting was the basis for engravings that became relatively popular in Ireland, appearing in a collection of loyalists songs or printed on silk handkerchiefs. (Loftus, 1980, p.3) However, this historical hero image of William was not the first to appear. Loftus explains. "Either he was a timeless, classical emperor, or a historical, heroic leader, often mounted on horse and leading his troops into battle". (Loftus, 1977, p.8) Thus as early as ten years after the Battle of the Boyne, a 'Roman emperor' style statue of William was erected outside Trinity College (where it remained until 1929). But the heroic, historical William was the one that appealed more to the northern gentry.

Later, the strengthening of that alliance in the struggle against Home Rule guaranteed cultural certainty and the wider acceptance of what were by then traditional images. Similarly, Loftus claims that "much of their gorgeous paraphernalia of banners, ashes and street arches"(Loftus, 1980, p.1) originated, not with the





establishment of the Orange Order, but with the Home Rule crisis from the 1880s they became truly established as the very essence of unionist solidarity. The alliance showed its power and efficiency in the successful opposition to a series of three Home Rule Bills between 1886 and 1912.

As a third Home Rule Bill appeared to be heading for success, the unionist bourgeoisie and gentry formed a government in waiting and placed themselves at the head of illegally organised units of a mass loyalist army, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Major sections of the British establishment colluded with the unionists. And in 1921, partition was imposed and the Northern Ireland state was formed. The formation of the state institutionalised and legitimized not only the unionist alliance, but also all the symbols and the cultural definitions forged and accepted by that alliance. Sectional symbols such as flags, banners, arches, songs, marches and other events took on the aura of universality. The state and its legitimacy rested on the triumph of unionism over nationalism. The state itself was of course the overarching symbol of that triumph, an institution whose very existence proclaimed the supposed legitimacy of unionist victory.

These symbols presumed a consensus that did not exist. As far as the nationalist minority was concerned, the very existence of the symbols as civic ones inevitably represented the triumph of unionism and the suppression of nationalism in the North of Ireland. The events of the Twelfth of July each year provide a case in point. The Twelfth is frequently depicted as no more than a carnival-like event. For nationalists in the North of Ireland it is different, for them the Twelfth is an annual reminder that they were the losers in the struggle over the establishment of the state.



After the initial 'teething troubles' of the state there was no major threat. Northern nationalists apparently had come to accept the fait accompli. The IRA in the north was a defeated force, not only as a result of state repression in the North, but also because of its isolation from the south.

Unionism settled down contentedly into an apparent endless period of majority rule. The celebration of unionism and its state reached a crescendo during the summer, particularly around the 12th. July. Although the customs surrounding the celebration were by then well established, with the conviction that the state was here to stay, the cultural practices took on an air of respectability. Since at least the beginning of the century, unionist working class areas had seen the erection of street arches, the painting of kerbstones, the hanging of bunting. But with the establishment of the state, these tasks nearly became a civic duty. Areas, and streets within areas, vied with each other for the most impressive arch.

Part of the annual ritual was the painting and repainting of murals. Like the other artefacts surrounding the Twelfth, exterior wall murals originated before the establishment of the Northern Ireland state. Thus Loftus notes that Belfast's first unionist wall mural was King Billy. (Loftus, 1980, p.1) Loftus's research has revealed that the range of themes covered in the murals was apparently wide.

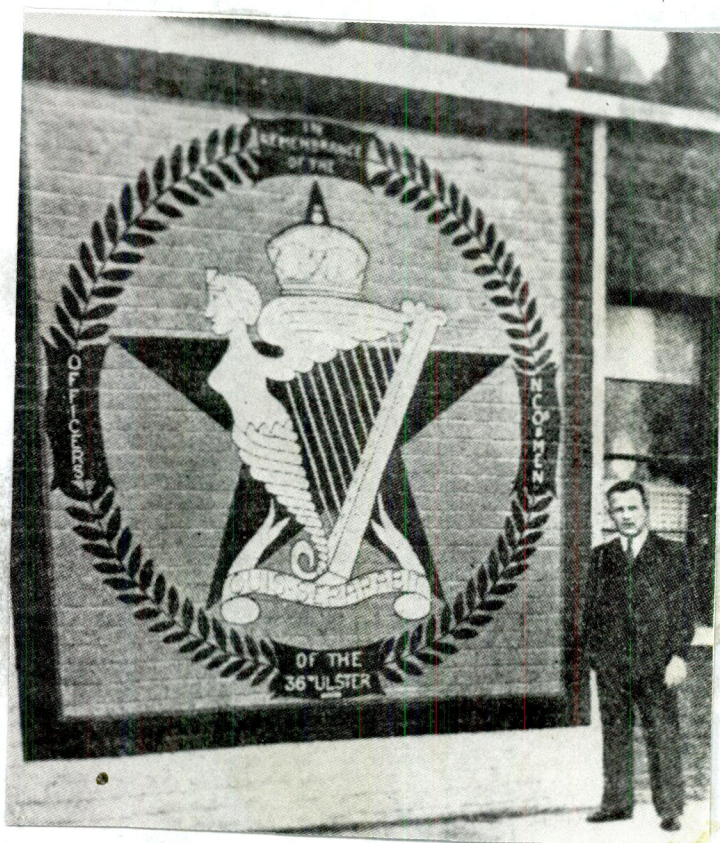
The ship named 'Mountjoy' was shown breaking the boom maintained by the Jacobites against the Protestant defenders of Derry in 1688; Lord Roberts appeared flanked by two Boer War Soldiers; the Ulster Division went over the top at the Battle of the Somme in action-packed detail. Angel of Mons hovered over the battlefield; the Titanic, built in Belfast's shipyards, went down with all the appeal of a disaster movie; King George V and







CORONATION 1936



36th Ulster Division Emblem





FOUNTAIN DERRY BOBBY JACKSON



OLDEST King Billy



Queen Mary were depicted at their coronations their gilt chairs behind them receding in sharp perspective; the visit of the Prince of Wales to northern Ireland was celebrated with a mural of him playing the great Lambeg drum, the favourite instrument of Orangemen; and Victory was celebrated in 1945 with rising sun and fly past of aeroplanes. (Loftus, 1980, p.1&2)

Unfortunately, photographic evidence of these early and interwar murals is sparse. The 1936 coronation mural mentioned above, painted on a gable wall in Little ship street, has been captured for posterity. The emblem of the 36th. Ulster Division, decimated at the Somme ,was painted at Fortingale Street in 1933 by John Mc Ilroy. However King Billy crossing the Boyne on a white horse was the most commonly depicted incident in the unionist repertoire.

The source for these 'crossing the Boyne' murals was, as Loftus notes one of a series of postcards produced by a Belfast printing firm early in the century.(Loftus, 1980,p.3) Imagination was never allowed to run totally wild, although Bobby Jackson, whose Derry mural depicting the Mountjoy breaking the boon on the one hand and King Billy crossing the Boyne on the other is the oldest extant mural in Northern Ireland, claims he changed the colour of William's horse from, the probably more accurate, black to a more aesthetic white because of a deathbed request by his mother. Generally, the variety in the traditional King Billy murals derived more from the individual skill of the artist than from artistic flights of fancy.

"There have been "King Billys as elegant as an 18th. century portrait or as a boisterously vulgar as a piece of pop art"(Loftus, 1980, p.4). The reason for this is that artists ranged from those who had previous paintings experience to those who painted more from pleasure or political commitment than skill. Bobby Jackson's





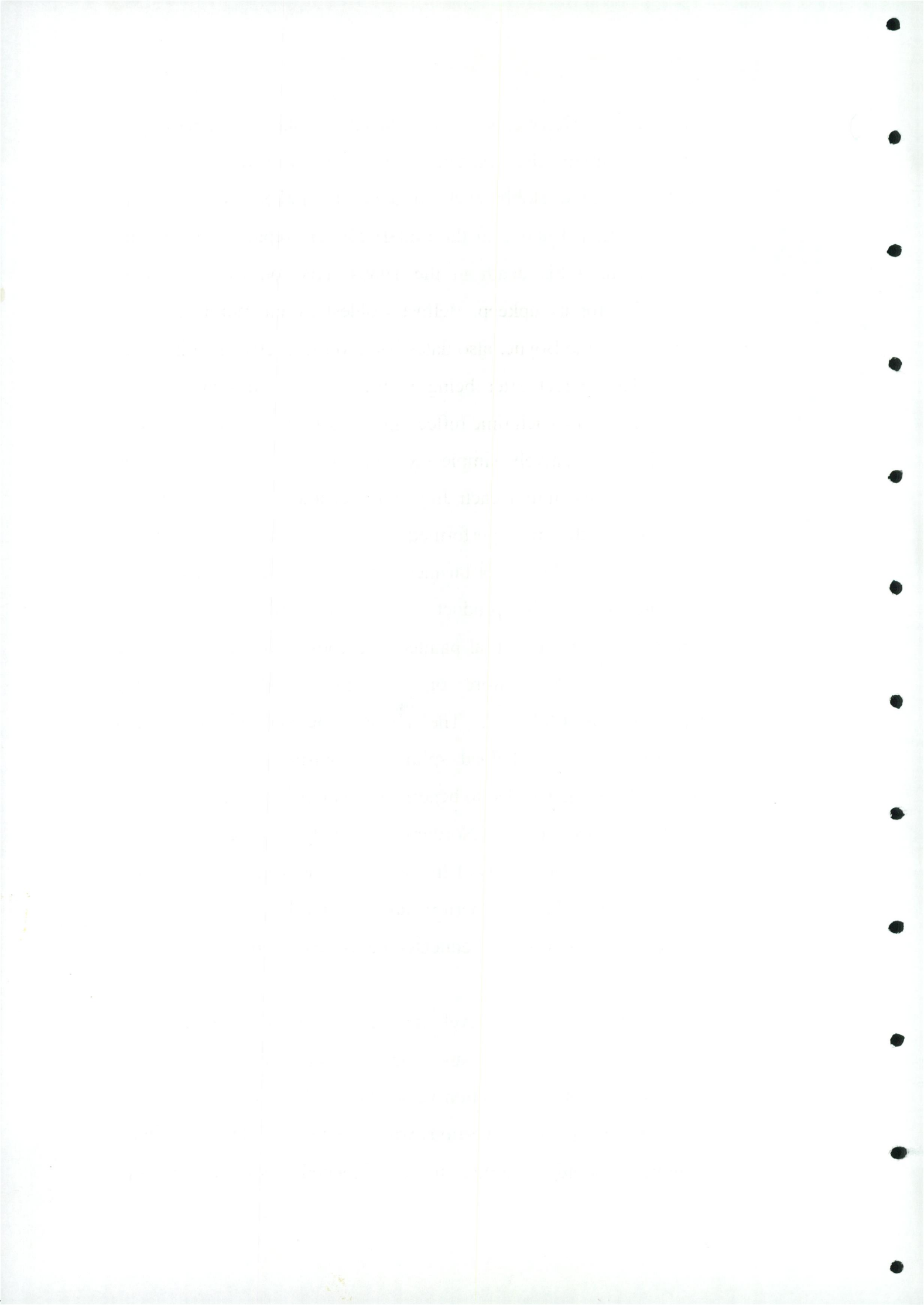




masterpiece in Derry exists to this day reveals another aspect of the loyalist tradition, the constant retouching, even re-designing of murals over time. Bobby Jackson helped his father paint the Derry mural mentioned above in the mid-1920s. He repainted it through the years until his death in the 1980s. His son Bobby is now responsible for its upkeep. Belfast's oldest extant mural, again of King Billy at the Boyne, also dates back to the 1920s. It still stands in Rockland Street after being retouched and redesigned in the proceeding years, each time reflecting the skill of the artist involved.

It is a relatively simple style painting of King Billy. The unveiling of the mural each July thus became a state occasion, a microcosm of the union performed by an MP or judge, army officer or minister, a landowner or business. No one dared to interfere with the mural artist or his product. As Loftus says of James Hume, shipyard worker and mural painter, "he chose whichever gable he wanted, even if it were on the side of the local police station"(Loftus, 1980, p.4). The arrival of the welfare's state began a process that later helped splinter unionism. For a start, its Universalist principles led to benefits for nationalists that they would not have gained under a Northern Ireland legislature. Thus, the provision in the late 1940s of free education at grammar school and university on the basis of merit meant the arrival, twenty years later, of a new class of articulate, educated nationalists impatient for social change.

At the ideological level, this antagonism was expressed in debates about tradition versus progress, sectarianism versus non-sectarianism, state intervention versus laissez faire, and so on. One of the most contentious questions was whether capable middle-class Catholics should continue to be blocked economically and









politically. The uncertainty and questioning of traditional identity became apparent at the level of cultural practices, not so much in the actual consent of those practices as in the extent of their overall decline. On the 9th July 1963 the Newsletter stated "the practice of painting King William murals on gables at the corners of Belfast streets is slowly dying". The reporter located only one mural in good condition, a King Billy at Silvergrove Street. In an article in the Sunday Press the following year (26th January 1964), Belfast playwright and actor Joseph Tomelty also was unable to ascertain the reason for the "dying art of gable painting"(Sunday Press, 26/1/64, p7).

The traditional culture practices were not totally dead, however. Banner painting, for example, was enough in demand to allow Frank Hargy of Potrush to earn his living solely as a painter of Orange banners in 1958, the first member of his family in three generations of the tradition to be able to do so(Belfast Telegraph, 4/7/58, p.9). But, considering that cultural practices and artefacts some how reveal underlying ideology, it can be said that the beginnings of unionist uncertainty were reflected in the decline of traditional cultural expression. Commentators such as Joseph Tomelty realised that the passing of the golden age was visible on unionist walls. There were fewer murals painted, and fewer still of reputable quality. The tradition of retouching the murals for the annual celebrations also declined.

Within a few years a full-fledged civil rights movement emerged. The unionist alliance, already showing signs of a split between liberals and hard-liners, was dealt another major blow, reacting to the civil demands with promises of reform on one hand



and the reality of repression on the other. It was a short step from that to the re-emergence of open and violent conflict.

But the civil rights movement confronted a unionist block already splitting into hard-line and liberal factions. As early as 1965, the UVF formed in opposition to the supposedly treacherous appeasement of nationalists being shown by the liberal Prime Minister Terence O'Neill. In 1966 the UVF committed its first sectarian murder. For those in the loyalist camp the state was clearly founded on the basis of containing and controlling the nationalist minority. Any attempt to weaken the mechanisms of containment and control thus were not only treasonable but potentially suicidal in political terms. Therefore the civil rights movement met with open repression, and out of the backlash the IRA eventually re-emerged in its traditional role as a defender of nationalist areas.

Before the birth and growth of the Provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army), however another factor appeared that was more devastating to unionist self-identity and confidence. The British government intervened by sending in soldiers from the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and B Specials to protect nationalists, and second by beginning to institute reforms that liberal unionism has been unwilling to concede previously. In 1970 the British instituted almost every civil rights demand, including the disbandment of the B Specials and the (temporary) disarming of the RUC. In 1972 they prorogued Stormont itself. Loyalists were caught in a dilemma that they had not experienced for sixty years; that is, opposing Britain in the name of being British.

Institutions such as the Orange Order went into decline in the 1970s to be replaced by mass organisations such as the UDA (Ulster Defence Association). But there was a major difference between the

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king Billy Coleraine

two types of organisation. The Orange Order represented the unionist alliance in its purest form, all classes of unionism marching together with the factory owners and landowners in the lead. The UDA as a mass organisation was overwhelmingly working class, with a leadership that was at most petit-bourgeois. The UDA marched, frequently in numbers rivalling what the Orange Order in its heyday could have mustered. Tens of thousands UDA men marched in the early and mid 1970s masked and wearing combat gear. Despite the ability of such populist organisations to put so many marching men on the streets, the popularity of the 12th. July marches declined.

As in other periods mural painting became an accurate barometer of the political atmosphere. But the cultural practice did not die totally. Instead, there was an almost frantic scrambling for new images to fit the times. Although there were a number of new murals, there were few depicting King Billy. A well painted and very traditional one appeared in the centre of Coleraine, complete with the Union Jack, the Ulster Flag and the flag of St. Andrew. A slightly less competent King Billy, but more original in its framing of the central character, was painted on the Crumlin Road in Belfast; there were flags as well as a crown, Orange lilies, and an Ulster Shield. In Larne a figure of King Billy was one of many symbols on a wall including a Union Jack, a ladder, a goat, a cock and a ship. Many of these symbols were themselves traditional Orange ones with a strong biblical connections and had appeared frequently in arches throughout the years. But what is interesting about them in this context is that they represent a trend that grew in significance in the 1970s, namely, the displacement of mythical representations and the appearance of inanimate emblems as the centre-piece of murals.









'KILL ALL IRISH'



LET SANDS DIE



Among these emblems were flags, particularly the Union Jack and the Ulster Flag, frequently given equal prominence. Loyalist mural painters had a problem finding new symbols to serve as a rallying point for confused unionism. They plundered widely to find inspiration for their murals. In one, the Red Devils of Manchester United Football Club coexist with the slogan of the SAS (Special Air Services) "Who Dares Wins", while the centre-piece is a slogan dormant in loyalist circles for forty years, "KAI" (Kill All Irish). These murals display cultural confusion rather than a newly forged cultural certainty.

In 1981 A republican hunger strike proved a turning point for the republican movement both in terms of political development and the emergence of mural painting. It did not however, have a similar effect on unionism. To Take one example: there were no loyalist murals produced to counter the tremendous propaganda boost gained by republicans through the hunger strike at most there were quasi-murals, carefully painted slogans with messages of open hostility. "The time is now for Sands to die". The republican hunger strike did not galvanise the disparate sections of unionism even in opposition in the same way as it did nationalism. Unionism it seemed was culturally impoverished in relation to nationalism. Nationalism could trace its root back not just to the Easter Rising of 1916, but to the "Celtic mists" of the sixth century and before. The idea that the present was rooted in the distant Celtic past inspired figures as different as W.B. Yeats the poet and James Connolly the socialist and revolutionary in his Labour in Irish History, first published in 1910. "For far too many the term 'Ulster culture' signifies nothing more than Orangemen parading on the 12th July." This is the opinion of the Young Unionist



council a section of the Official Unionist Party, They argued further that

For too long we have been content to neglect our culture while Gaelic nationalism has made every effort and used every opportunity to propound Irish culture (Belfast Telegraph, 6/6/86, p.14)

In their search for roots, the young unionists had the path prepared for them by a book originally published twelve years previously. Adamson(1974) meticulously recreated the history of the Cruithin (or Picts), the pre-Milesian inhabitants of the northern part of Ireland. The Cruithin were overrun by the expansion of the Celts. Some became vassals of the powerful O'Neill clan that held power in Ulster until the Elizabethan plantations; others were forced to flee to Scotland. The political message of the Cruithin story to contemporary loyalists was threefold. First, it was a counterclaim to nationalist mythology: "We were here first". Second, heroes and achievements claimed by nationalists were judged to have been 'hijacked' by them. For example, Cuchulain, the great warrior who defended Ulster against the invading Celts, was a Cruithin. The planters who went from Scotland to Ulster in the seventeenth century could be said to have merely returning home 'claiming their birthright' as the Ulster Unionists put it. Adamson, writing under his pen name Sam Sloan in the UDA's magazine Ulster, sums it up. "You are the children of Cruithin, the sons and daughters of the Picts"(Ulster, Oct.78, p.4) Outside of certain sections of the UDA the argument found little support for a long time. Its adoption however belatedly by young unionist owes more to the unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement than the real

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Roy Bradford memorial



Danewana No Surrender

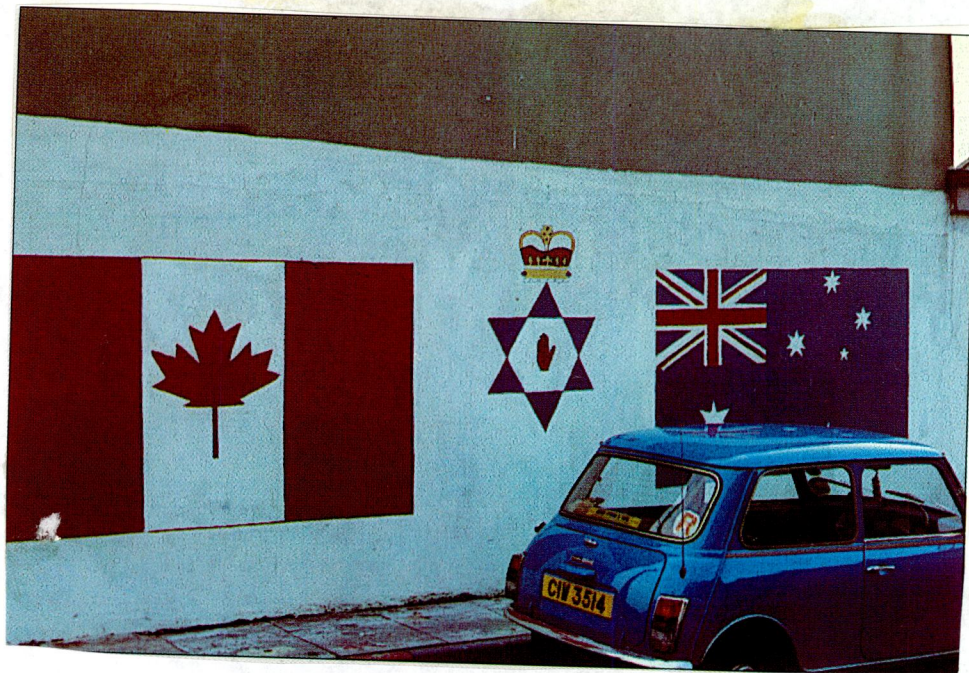


belief of Adamson's revision of history. Thus they were unable to accept the stance of Presbyterians United Irishmen in 1798 despite Adamson claiming their efforts were in defence of the Cruithin nation. Nor did the main Unionist party's adopt the Cruithin theory. In short Cruithism failed to provide the ideological cohesion so badly needed by unionism nor did it inspire the muralists within loyalism to any great extent. However the emergence of the Red Hand of Ulster and its adoption as a symbol of Ulster separatism became common. Ironically, the Red Hand symbol belonged to the heraldry of the O'Neill clan which had led the uprising of 1641 which almost led to the sudden death of Ulster's Elizabethan plantation. King Billy continued to appear with predictable uniformity, however much more common throughout the 1980s was the representation of flags. The heraldic grandeur in most of these cases can be taken as harking back to past glories as well as being at odds with current confused realities. These murals reveal a false confidence.

In some cases the murals appear with only a Union Jack as on the toilet in Donemana, Co. Derry. In others the Ulster Flag is given equal space, as in Bond Street in Derry. Some murals carry the Scottish flag of St. Andrew as with Roy Bradfords memorial. This is a particularly low time for loyalist murals. At a time when republicans were making allusion to their connection to international struggles for liberation in Palestine, South Africa or South America, Unionism seems to have been reduced to connecting itself with the Union Jack i.e. Britain occasionally or sometimes dismissing it in favour of a Scottish alliance. Perhaps the political isolation is best summed up in a mural in Derry in 1982, one Australian the other a







Australia/canadian flags



Canadian, flanking the Red Hand of Ulster. The connections are to an empire that no longer exists.

The increasing militancy of the loyalist paramilitaries provided the needed vent for the loyalist identity. Murals of armed loyalist began to appear in front of the inanimate heraldry. A huge arms shipment imported by Brian Nelson a serving British Army Intelligence officer from the white South African regime was distributed among loyalist paramilitaries at this time and may have inspired loyalist muralists. Thus on Ainsworth Avenue 1984 an armed loyalist sentry faces his foe, behind him the flags and symbols of loyalism.

Despite the upsurge in such murals few representations of armed loyalist or their actions had appeared before this time despite armed activities going on for almost twenty years. Perhaps a major reason for this lack of representation was the fact that loyalist military activity mainly involved the assassination of lone unarmed nationalists, usually civilians. It would be difficult to portray random sectarian killings as heroic. The solution to this problem is to present armed loyalists as symbols along with their flags and other emblems. They are slick, clean and inanimate as the flags they pose in front of. It would be hard to imagine that these flat figures being moved to randomly kill Catholics. However, despite evidence of an upsurge in loyalist paramilitaries being linked to a British intelligence importation of arms it would be wrong to reduce their phenomena purely to a conspiracy. The Anglo-Irish Agreement had inspired confusion and feelings of betrayal in unionism. The agreement had intended to stifle the rise of Sinn Fein but had done so by giving the appearance of Irish government involvement in Northern Irish affairs. All this had been done without consulting unionist opinion.

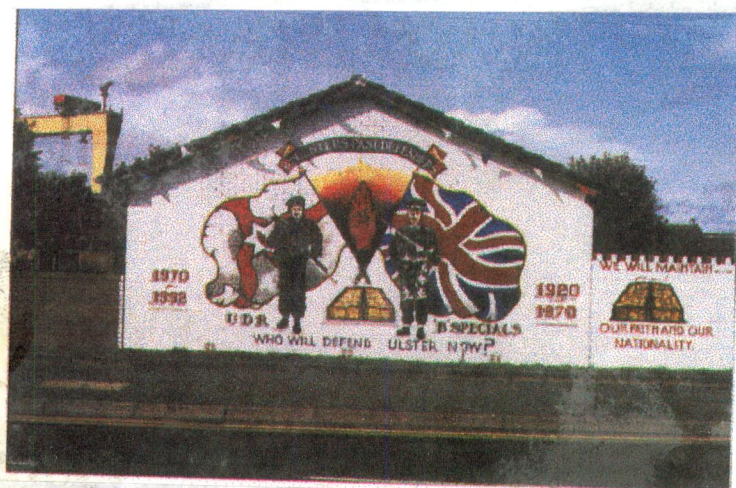








Women of Ulster & Defenders



Past Defenders



It was inevitable that Catholic deaths would follow given the historical pattern of Loyalist reaction to any form of change or uncertainty. On the walls the response to the Anglo-Irish agreement was initially confined to slogans e.g. "Ulster says No". As with the heraldic murals these slogans were soon linked to armed figures. In the Fountain of Derry for instance residents proclaimed that they remained under siege and would not surrender to the Anglo Irish Agreement. The 75th anniversary of the foundation of the UVF and the slaughter of the 36th. Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme provided an historical and military context for the actions of the modern day defenders of Ulster. In a mural on Mekon Street in 1988 a number of strands of loyalist murals come together. The Ulster Flag stands opposite the Union Jack with an animated Red Hand in the centre, two women keep the home fires burning below while the men of the original UVF and their descendants bare arms in the centre. Other historical murals point to the loyalist position about their status vis a vis the state where legal and extra legal loyalist forces are represented as defenders of the state in an unbroken and uncontradictory line. So it is that a line of descent from the 1912 UVF through the B Specials, the UDR, RIR ending in modern UVF figures could be shown without fear that this representation would be seen as inaccurate. It seems loyalism has revised its dependency on the authority of the State to simple military authority. Loyalist muralism has continued in this vein since then producing beautiful ever more pictures of their military heroes. Even the announcement of an IRA cease fire followed shortly by a cease fire on the part of the loyalist paramilitaries has not caused a changed in shift. In fact the IRA cease fire was portrayed in Loyalist murals as a military success, a triumph over republicanism. On the Shankill Road in

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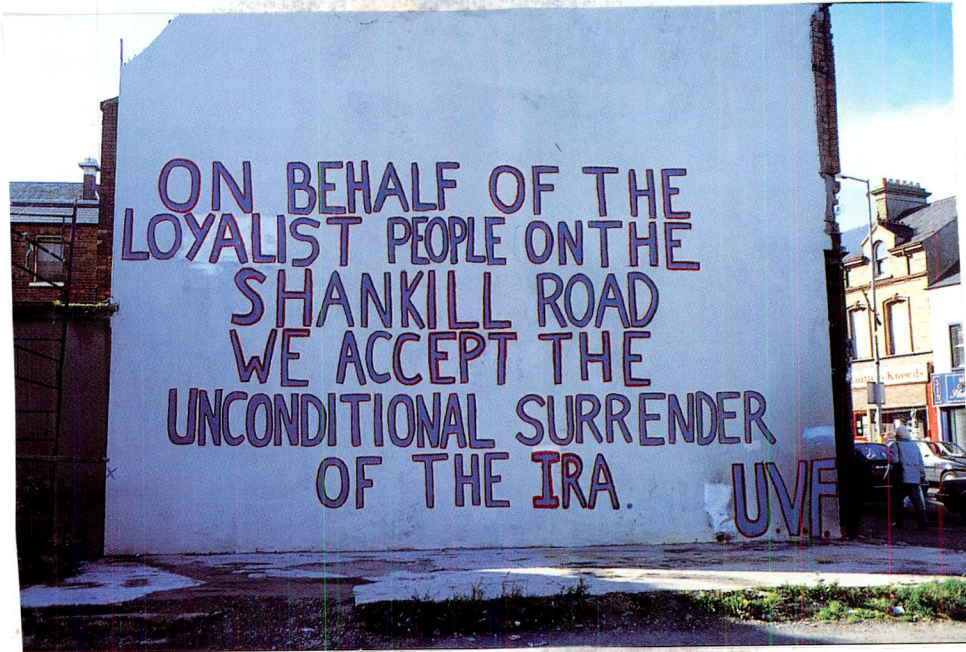
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1 IRA SURRENDER





Prepared for Peace Ready for War



Michael Stone as King Billy



1994 a mural accepts "the unconditional IRA surrender". In 1995 in Dover Place Belfast armed loyalist are still ready to break doors, presumably in search of nationalists. In Mount Vernon Road at the same time loyalists 'prepared for peace' and ready for war look surprisingly similar both being armed and defensive. Whether unwilling or unable to advance any better understanding of their culture loyalist celebration of militarism seems puny compared to the past celebrations of Protestant victories. For at least in the celebration of Protestant libertarian victories over Catholic authoritarianism that we saw in the original murals of King Billy, the glorious surrender had a pretext, and the subordination of Catholics could be justified in the cohesion of the Unionist family and Protestant State. The replacing of King Billy by emblematic heraldry or masked men has pointed to the breakup of the Unionist monolith and of its glorious days prior to 1969. Now Michael Stone of more contemporary and doubtful fame has replaced King Billy on his horse ironically next to the masterpiece painted by Bobby Jackson. It seems the great Unionist myth has become lost in history and political reality that has yet to inform them that the feudal empire, from which their culture emerged, has long since ended.

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### **CHAPTER 3 : "From The Ghetto"**

When Ireland was first partitioned in 1921 northern nationalists did not believe the new state would survive the boundary commission. Encouraged and armed by the government of the new free state the IRA continued to wage a campaign against the Northern Ireland government. Nationalist councils refused to recognise the state and nationalist school teachers drew their salaries from the southern authorities.

However in the context of a bitter civil war, particularly with the demise of Collin's Northern Ireland, it faded in significance as did the IRA campaign eventually dwindling out of existence, the boundary commission confirmed the geography of the states, non-conforming councils replaced by commissions and school teachers were brought to heel. Northern Ireland existed in fact for northern nationalists however unpalatable and they settled to reluctant citizenship.

Although Northern Nationalists had been elected to the northern parliament they did not take their seats till 1925 and waited a further forty years before fully becoming involved in the parliament as the official opposition. Psychologically Northern nationalists lived in a state of enforced exile within their own country. Whether this state of mind was self induced or well founded may be disputed but in fact nationalist lived in Northern Ireland as a people apart.

Ireland had traditionally been ruled by a system of sectarian ascendancy and although this sectarianism had been more virulent in Ulster, where the ascendancy had been more densely planted,

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sectarian privilege existed within the moderating context of a nationalist majority in Ireland and a concentration of political power in Britain by virtue of Westminster. However the partition of Ireland brought an end to moderation and sectarian domination was institutionalized and vindicated by awarding it statehood and the legitimacy of majority within the hastily devised mechanism of the six counties.

The first prime minister of Northern Ireland James Craig was able to declare that his was 'A protestant state for a protestant people' Nationalists were subordinate, economically, politically and culturally within the state. Furthermore nationalists had been relegated historically to specific geographical ghettos.

Although Nationalist and Unionist shared almost all facets of culture except their politicians heritage the cultural differences that these respective political outlooks precipitated were not insignificant. One glance at Irish literature and the pervading sense of victimhood is overwhelming. Imperialism as it impacted on Irish Nationalists has created a culture of the oppressed, which connives privately or by times applauds vigorously resistance and opposition.

Since the defeat of the United men in 1798 this culture of opposition which is synonymous with nationalism has largely become the possession of Nationalist catholics with the relief of Presbyterians from the severity of the penal laws and their absorption into the unionist family, since that time

The culture of nationalism in its sense of oppression found voice within the community maintained schools, halls and playing fields of nationalist ghettos. To play Gaelic football or practice Irish dancing may have been subtle if not ineffectual expressions of



Robert Emmet 1953



James Conolly 1970's



opposition to the state however they were important and hugely popular among nationalists.

Despite the promotion of the Gaelic league as the G.A.A., no equivalent visual expression manifested itself within Northern Ireland whether through reluctance to confront the state openly or through lack of a visual tradition by comparison to the lively articulation of unionism through its murals, banners and street arches nationalism remained mute virtually to the 1980s

Perhaps it is not remarkable that nationalists should not have painted murals given that mural painting is an exceptional and remarkable practice coming as it did in Northern Ireland apparently spontaneously from the Unionist community. Muralism had emerged in Belfast as a celebration of unionist triumph and for a culture based on defeat the project of muralism was wholly inappropriate and a new interpretation of the medium would be required before it could be adopted by nationalism

Beyond speculation is the fact that state opposition to expressions of nationalism or republicanism served well to stifle any such display. The flags and emblems act enshrined in law the illegality of any display which might provoke a breach of the peace and was generally accepted as any display of the Irish tricolour. It could be expected that state law as practice not only served to stifle public displays of opposition but also to repress nationalism particularly republicanism as legitimate political positions.

Exceptional instances did occur however and in 1953 a mural commemorating Robert Emmet's rising of 1803 was painted in Ardoyne. A bust of Emmet is presented alongside a harp and both were surrounded by a frieze of laurels. The words "Erin go Bragh" were painted underneath. Although remembered as a revolutionary









Emmet strangely has been adopted by 'hibernianism' as an icon and as such is fully in the tradition of constitutional nationalism

Even with the advent of open conflict in Northern Ireland no mural movement emerged from within nationalism, and wall painting remained at the level of comment and slogan painting. However again exceptionally official I.R.A. supporters painted a mural of the bust of James Connolly in the early 70s in Ardoyne. Another Easter commemoration mural appeared in Derry in the 1970s.

It can be argued that the emergence of political art can be traced to the reintroduction of internment in 1971. Traditionally republicans had produced handcrafts while imprisoned from at least the twenties. (see the National Museum). Prisons have traditionally been for republicans, associated with heightened political debate, education and agitation. In conjunction with politics, history and the Irish language, prisoners taught each other craft skills. This resulted in a flurry of wooden harps, painted handkerchiefs and leatherwork emerging from the prisons.

The themes of the paintings and designs in these works went from Cu Chullain to Che Guevara, via James Connolly. Intricate Celtic design was common, as were images of the mythical phoenix rising from the ashes. So successful was this work that many nationalist working class homes possess some of these artifacts.

Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland enjoyed political status or 'special category status' as the British had it, from 1972. Prisoners sentenced in the non-jury diplock courts were sent to compounds where the inmates had their own command structures.





By 1976 a change had come in British government thinking deciding instead on a policy of criminalisation. The compounds in which political prisoners had been held would be phased out and a new cellular system would be introduced along with a concurrent withdrawal of political status. Prisoners would in the future be required to wear prison uniforms, do prison work and undergo the authority of the ordinary criminal penal system.

Criminalisation was opposed by republican prisoners from the outset with prisoners refusing to wear prison uniforms, instead covering themselves with blankets from their beds, (thus Blanketmen). Inevitably, the protest escalated with prison officers refusing prisoners access to toilets and prisoners disposing of their excrement by smearing it on their cell walls.

If resistance had been synonymous with the culture of republicanism a new heightened experience of such a culture was now beginning. Fitting into Irish cultural notions of victimhood and resistance in seemingly hopeless situations every activity of the Blanketmen began to achieve heroic proportions, within nationalist communities.

For four years the 'Blanket and no wash' protest continued with increasing numbers and apparent determination. The British government were determined that 'a crime is a crime' and saw no reason why they should bow to 'terrorism.' In this context a hunger strike began in October 1980 and ended 2 months later with apparent British concessions having been promised. However these concessions were not forthcoming and a second strike was embarked on, led by Bobby Sands.

With almost five hundred prisoners on the blanket at any one time, few families in nationalist areas did not know somebody or



have a brother, sister, father or uncle on the blanket. The campaign to garner support had been undertaken by many of these people. It was highly personalized and emotional.

The second hunger strike brought a huge increase in the number of anti-H. Block Armagh committees. Anti-H. Block slogans began to appear everywhere all over nationalist areas. White line pickets and protest marches became common, as ~~did~~ posters bearing hunger strikers pictures. People were called on to identify with hunger strikers.

The British government had explained that the republican prisoners were convicted criminals, that their crimes were often unspeakable, and that they were in the business of facing down the criminal conspiracy of republicanism. However for most nationalists the hunger strikers were far from criminals, but rather people who they could identify with, who had now reached heroic proportions in challenging the British government.

Bobby Sands, a young working class man of 27, had already spent eight years in prison. From a family who had been burnt out of their home in 1969, Sands was easily moved to join the I.R.A.. As a writer and poet, Sands wrote stories of daily life in prison, and his revolutionary vision inspired many nationalists to republicanism.

Slogans in nationalist areas started to carry quotes from these writings, for example 'Tiocfaidh Ár Lá.' As the situation worsened and Sands death grew nearer more care was taken with these slogans. Walls were painted black and the lettering was carefully painted in white.

Commercial hoarding increasingly became the focus of quasi-murals. However it was on the White Rock Road that the first









First Mural Republican



victory To Blanketmen & 4 names



mural appeared. It consisted of a black background with two figures in white (two protesting prisoners), and verse from Joe Brolly's anti-H. Block song. A similar mural appeared around the corner with a monochrome image of a 'blanketman,' two tri-colours,' and the slogan 'victory to the blanketmen.' We can see that both of these are early not only because of the simplicity of their style but because in the first no mention is made of the hunger strike, and in the second only the first four names appear.

The death of Bobby Sands resulted in a torrent of emotion. One hundred and twenty thousand people attended his funeral. Northern nationalism had not known such strength of feeling since 'bloody Sunday.'

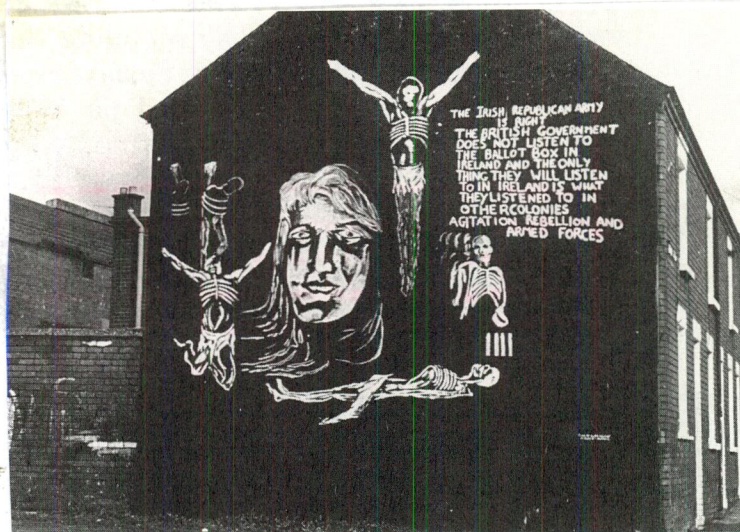
Within a few months over a hundred murals appeared in Belfast, fifty in Derry, and others in Armagh, Lurgan, and Strabane. Never before had republicanism been articulated in such a visible way.

Obviously it was the hunger strike which provided the theme for these murals and therefore Bobby Sands was most commonly portrayed along with a piece of text or slogan. As for example in Derry in 1981, where Sands is portrayed beside the slogan 'spirit of freedom.' It is as though Sands has reached messianic proportions by now, his image and his life are synonymous with the struggle for freedom.

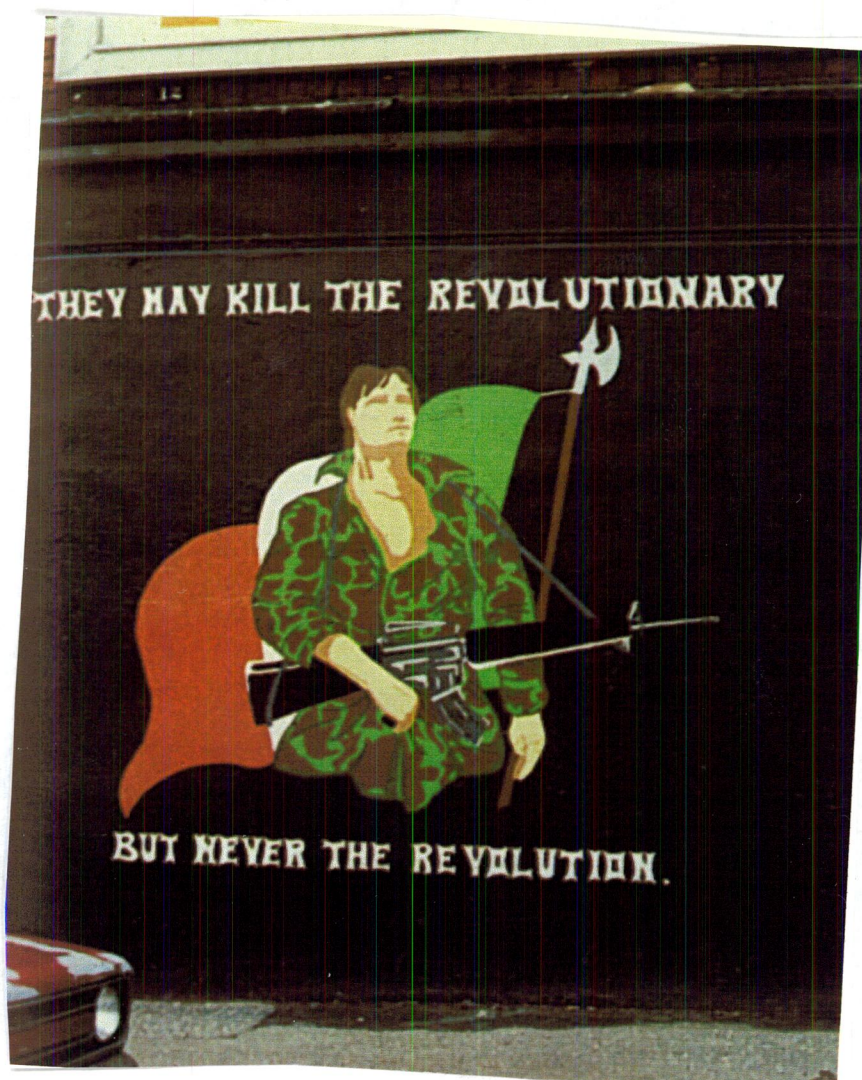
However, increasing attempts to explain the I.R.A.'s war against the British government began to emerge in murals such as that on Oakman Street where a portrait of Bobby Sands as a crucified Christ appears alongside a tract summing up the I.R.A.'s position "The Irish Republican Army is right. The British government does not listen to the ballot box in Ireland and the only



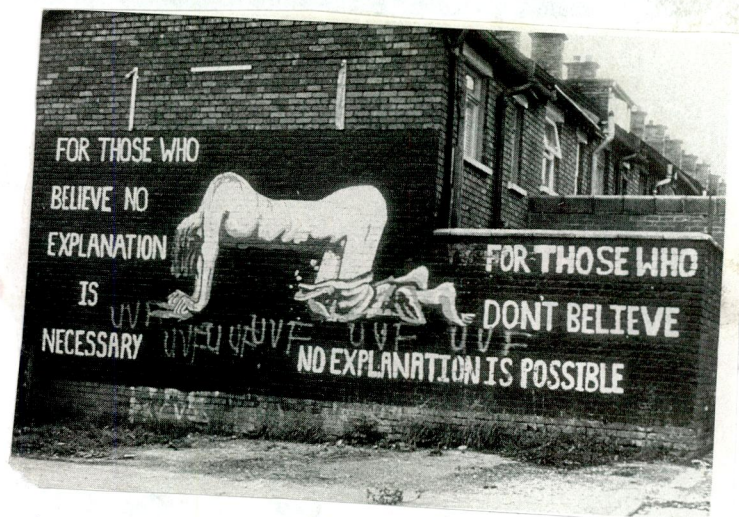




CRUCIFIED SANDS



'But never till a revolution



'For those who Believe'



thing they listen to in Ireland is what they listened to in other countries, agitation, rebellion, and armed struggle."

The stark black and white monochrome of these early murals reflects not only the lack of skill of the muralists but also the starkness of the era.

Further attempts to explain the republican struggle can be seen in the portrayal of the 'conveyor-belt system' as republicans termed the justice administration of Northern Ireland. This portrayed a series of images depicting the arrest, torture, and conviction of a man who emerges defiantly wearing a blanket. This image appeared both in Derry and in Belfast. Conscious of the need to explain their struggle, a telling mural sums up what republicans believed to be their dilemma. On Ethna Drive in 1981, a kneeling blanketman prompts the text "for those who believe no explanation is necessary and for those who don't none is possible."

Religious symbolism pervades many hunger strike murals. As a time associated with lingering death it might be expected that these deaths would evoke notions of death and suffering specific to the communities the hunger strikers came from. The perceived pacificity of the hunger strikers in face of injustice fitted well into the Irish catholic notion of passive suffering, both of themselves and their Christ. While the image of the bearded, almost naked men, lent itself to the parody of the crucified Christ so common in nationalist homes.

However it must be borne in mind that republicans who had been largely criticised and their actions condemned by the hierarchy of the catholic church now sought to justify theologically and morally their cause. Political messages such as the ones mentioned above were inter-changed with religious biblical quotes, for









example, in Ballymurphy a mural carries the words from the sermon on the mount "blessed are those who hunger for justice."

However despite the existence of these passive, moralising, and pseudo-religious murals, the predominance of these murals made a direct connection with the I.R.A. struggle as in Rockdale Street in 1981, where an armed man is portrayed being the "they may kill the revolutionary but never the revolution."

The wheel turned fully from passive 'crucified' prisoners seeking the justification of a higher moral authority to the anonymous but familiar figures personifying the I.R.A. campaign, with accompanying justification from the utterances of the strikers who have moved from needing authority to now providing it.

Many murals were painted of hunger strikers' funerals with I.R.A. figures firing volleys of shots over the coffins, as in Juniper Park, 1981. Even the deaths and funerals of hunger strikers have been recycled into pressing the case for resistance.

Although many people supported the hunger strikers on purely humanitarian grounds, the muralists themselves seem to have avoided the opportunity to distance the hunger strikers from an I.R.A. campaign. In fact the opposite occurred, with the relentless use of every facet of the hunger strike to promote armed struggle.

In line with this emphasis on the long term critical analysis of republicanism, murals depicting their traditional icons began to emerge. Thus in Rossville Street, Derry, 1981, Cuchulainn appears beside a roll of honour of republican volunteers. Perhaps the best historical mural is a copy of Jeff Perks lino cut in the style of Guernica which depicts Ireland as the long-standing victim of British imperialism. The muralists link this to the already existing





Everyone has a part



Mandela's Birthday



mural of the 'conveyor-belt system' of justice. If this wave of mural activity had been sparked by the hunger strikes then it might be imagined that the number of murals might dwindle with the resolution of the issue. However this was not the case. For the first year after the hunger strikes at least, murals appeared with almost the same frequency although the hunger strikes initially ended up in apparent defeat for the protesters; huge amounts of people had been drawn to republicanism. Many of these had never before been closely connected with the struggle.

A huge swelling of support and recruitment to Sinn Fein was a result of this radicalization. Although republicans had traditionally followed a policy of abstentionism the election of Bobby Sands, Kieran Doherty, and Patsy Agnew, pointed to the power of electoral politics. As Sinn Fein began to take on this role murals in support of their candidates began to appear, as in Bond Street in 1983. These murals were not of the same quality as earlier murals although we see the ideological battle for authority and legitimacy continue in their text. For example "parliament is the political wing of the British army," addresses British assertions that Sinn Fein was the political wing of the I.R.A..

Sinn Fein itself had been radicalized by the hunger strikes and began to see its role as more than merely putting forward the republican position vis a vis partition. Issues which had been dealt with by middle-class nationalists traditionally became the concern of republicans who now realized the opportunity to agitate and expose the regime on these issues.

This change of self-perception is successfully reflected in a mural depicting a radicalized version of Rosin Dubh, a traditional symbol for Ireland. This depiction of Ireland is wholly different

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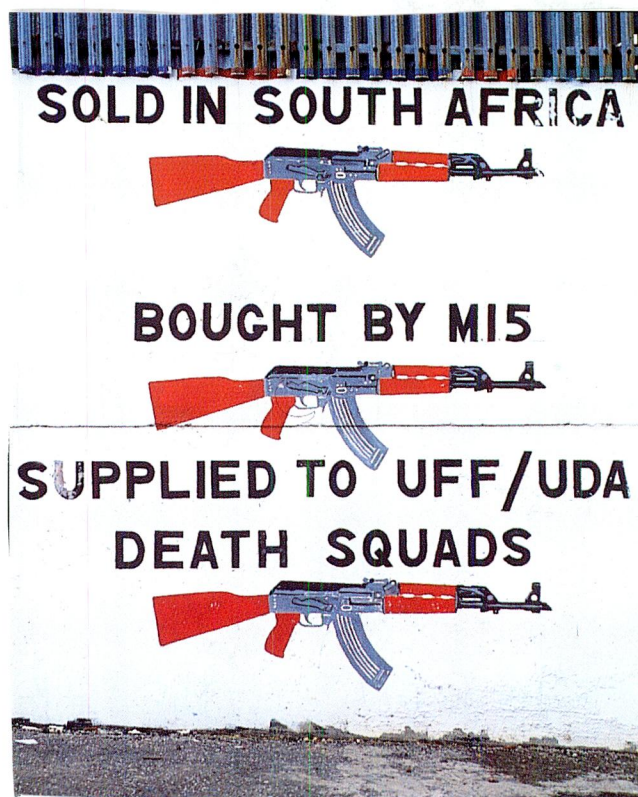
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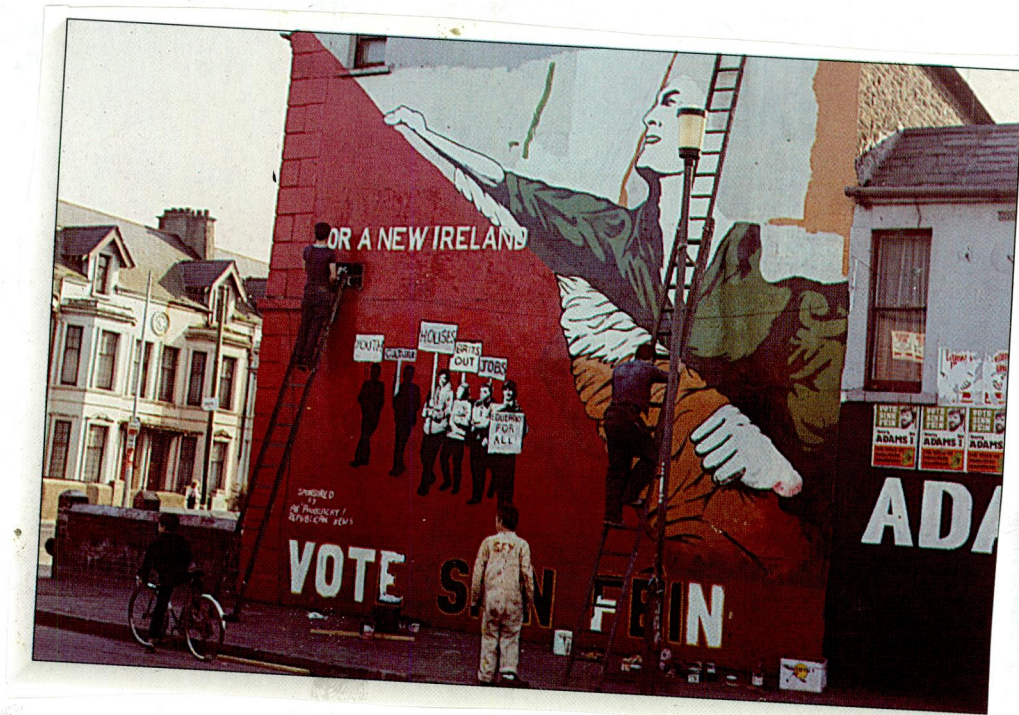


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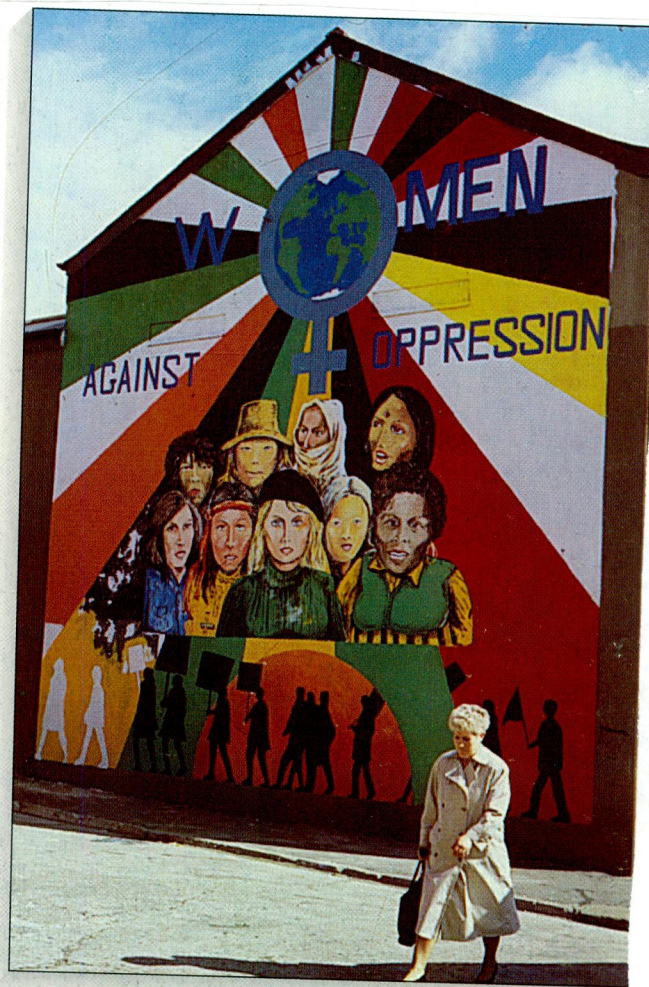


Brian Nelson Storey





Sin Fein Agitation



Oppression and Women



from the traditional old widow figure who has been abandoned and bears her suffering passively. Rather, Ireland here is portrayed as a young woman who peels back a tri-colour to reveal the agitational activities of Sinn Fein. The outburst of energy that was the hunger strike drew many people into republicanism. Not least of these were the groups of young people who got together on the slogan writing which they had already been engaged in. These young people were largely untrained although some had taken art as a secondary school subject. But without any prior reference to judge themselves by, they undertook the task of mural painting unself-consciously. Working together these groups would paint often with little more than the brushes and a ladder.

Like their paints the muralists seemed to have taken imagery from wherever they could get it. Although some of the work is primarily imaginative, magazines, posters, book-covers, photographs, and paintings provided the images that could be encoded into the visual vocabulary of republicanism.

Some of the most original images came from the H. Blocks where no source material of any kind existed. These images were smuggled out from the jail on tiny scraps of paper.

The murals seem to have been welcomed by the communities. One depicting the blessed virgin and the hunger strikers prompted the woman on whose wall it was painted to ask the local priest to bless it. Many people now actively sought murals to be painted on their houses and the artists themselves began to achieve some acclaim. Such was the respect for the muralists that people would offer to protect their murals from 'paint bombing' by the R.U.C. or the British army. Of course it was inevitable that the spontaneous energy of the early 1980s would not last indefinitely. The small

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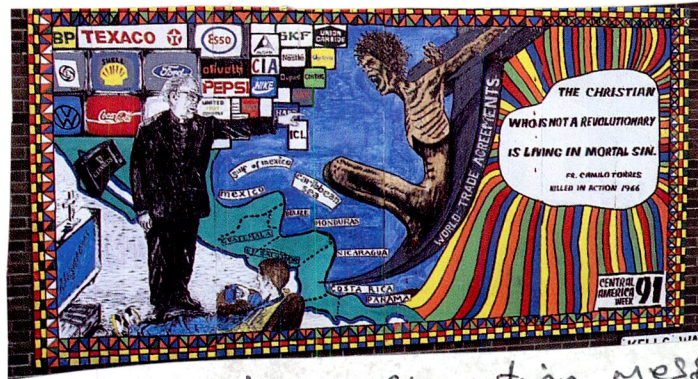
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chilean christian message

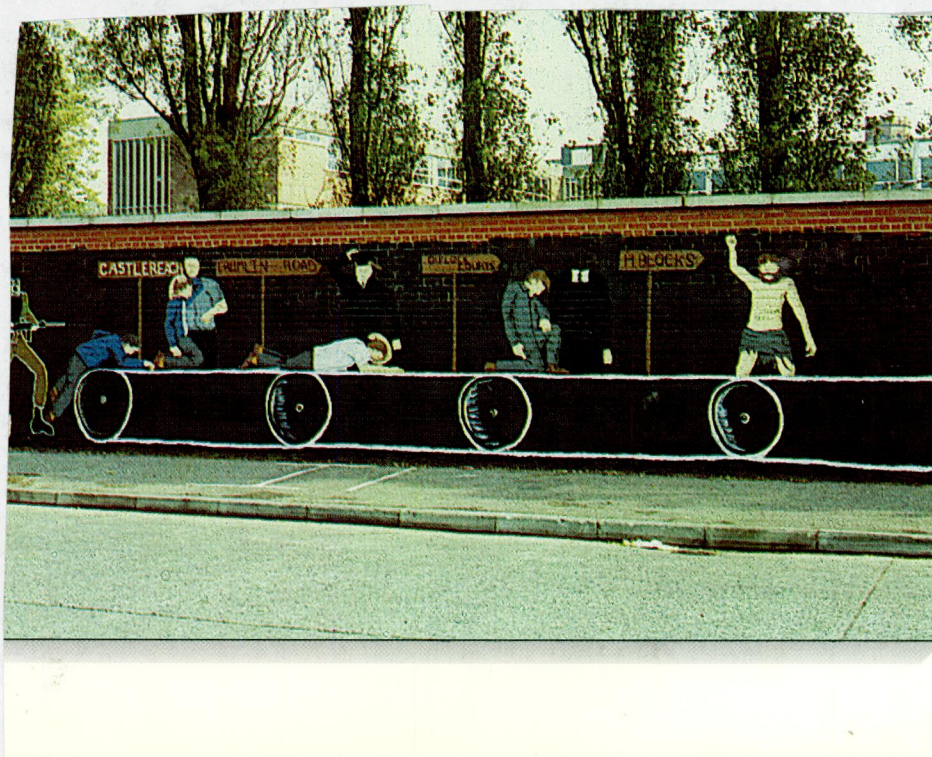


Loch gall





King Nuada



Conveyor Belt



local groups of activists began to be absorbed into the Sinn Fein movement while some of them drifted completely away from politics. Even those who had become active members of Sinn Fein, without the urgency of the hunger strike became involved in other activities within republican politics.

However what remained was a smaller but more aware cadre of muralists who clearly saw their role as political activists working solely through the medium of mural painting. Gerard Kelly is perhaps the best known of these and has developed a style of his own. However he works in cooperation with a group of artists. His work is typified in the 'King Nuada' mural (1987). Having been in jail himself during the hunger strikes and having depended on the efforts of others to highlight their concerns, Kelly emerged from jail to take on this role himself.

This cadre is aware of its position as purveyors of the alternative truth. There is little doubt that they are involved in a war of pictures. Their work quotes from the Republican newspaper, An Phoblacht, glorifies the I.R.A. and draws complimentary political and cultural connections with republicanism. Inextricably linked as these murals are to republican campaigns, they are unashamedly propagandistic and in that sense just another weapon in the improvised arsenal of republicanism.

It is clear that this new wave of muralists brought a degree of sophistication to republican murals. The scale, style, and colour alone departed enormously from earlier dreary murals of the hunger strike. For example, even a mural commemorating the death of eight I.R.A. volunteers at Lough Gall resists being morose and is bright and defiant.

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In 1988 the tribute to Nelson Mandela makes clear these muralists had their eye on a bigger agenda and were as concerned about how the world perceived them as they perceived the world. Thus the resistance of women to oppression was linked to republicanism by means of enlisting armed revolutionary women from various countries into one mural that read simply "women against repression" but meant clearly that many women and many people opposing injustice world-wide supported the cause of republicanism. If the Irish republican cause was internationalist, progressive, and popular, then it was easy to explain the opposition to republicanism as racist, or linked to racist regimes as in the mural declaring Beechmount Belfast an apartheid-free zone, while depicting a loyalist fighter as a gruesome purveyor of death backed by Britain. Perhaps there is some truth in this analogy given the story of Brian Nelson which is well illustrated in the mural painted on Springhill Avenue 1994, which simply makes the statement "Sold in South Africa, bought by MI5, and supplied to UVF/UDA death squads."

International links were not simply imagined by republican muralists. They collaborated with muralists from Nicaragua, Chile, and Mexico in their work. Derry and Managua are linked in an exotic mural in 1992 and the words of the revolutionary South American priest Camillo Torres are etched by Chilean and Mexican muralists also on the walls of Derry "the Christian who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin."

The versatility of these muralists can be seen in their handling of and speedy adjustment to the peace strategy of the republican movement. When the I.R.A. began its negotiations that led to the cease-fire of 1994 the muralists of Belfast and Derry's republican



ghettos moved swiftly from advocating armed struggle to becoming protesters for peace.

Republicanism had entered into an alliance with nationalist opinion on the issues of independence, equality, and justice. In line with this strategy a renewed civil rights campaign challenging various aspects of the state from imprisonment to sectarian policing, and constitutional arrangements were undertaken. The muralists responded in Derry with a mural of a civil rights rioter of the early 70s. It is as though we are being asked to remember the initial causes of conflict in Northern Ireland. Young boys who had thrown stones against the sectarian regime had grown to partake in bitter war and it seems were now about to embark on a campaign for civil rights which would ultimately mean an end to British rule.











## **CHAPTER 4 : How and Why**

So far we have catalogued the chronological history of political murals in Ireland. This history has been very different and specific to the communities from whence it emerges yet for all their difference in opinion and opposing political aspirations both republican and the loyalists use of muralism as a medium is unique in Western Europe. Ironically it links them in a cultural practice that works at an ideological level in exactly the same way in both communities.

Bill Rolston reckons "murals are not unlike advertisements which may at first seem brash, blunt, and unsubtle, but have developed the art of telling complex stories in deceptively simple ways." (Rolston, *Distant Relations*, 1994, p.196)

Elaborating on this notion of complexity within seemingly simple, unsophisticated mediums, Fiske and Hartley in their study "Reading Television" (1990), make the observation in their own field of study, that a seemingly unsophisticated medium can exist within a tradition that goes well beyond the existence of the medium itself.

To this end they make the point that television acts much like a traditional bard. Given Rolston's analogy of mural painting and story-telling I think we can more properly explain the phenomenon of mural painting as an ideological process by placing it within this body of tradition. Fiske and Hartley point out that the traditional bard had a unique function that fulfilled certain criteria and demands of culture.



In line with this they assert that the role of a mural is to firstly articulate the main concerns of the society from which it comes. Therefore when we use the term bard we are stressing certain qualities common both to muralism and to traditional bardic forms. For example the bard has been classically a mediator of language. This language in our case being wall murals. The language is mediated to construct images of culture which will confirm and reinforce their own self-image. As Fiske and Hartley say "the traditional bard rendered the central concerns of his day into verse." (Fiske and Hartley, 1990, p.86) Likewise all the murals we have seen have rendered the concerns of their communities into an equally specialized form thus a simple red hand can express and encapsulate the entire political fears and hopes of a community.

Secondly the bard produces images demanded by his culture and not by his own need to communicate or by the need of the text to make internal sense. Barthes' in 1977 writes that in ethnographic society the responsibility for narrative is assumed by a mediator who may only be admired for his or her narrative skill but never their genius. Thus the political murals of Ireland do not relate the individual biographies or the exclusively personal feelings of the painters, who act as Barthes' explains, as mediators of the message only. The author of the message is ultimately the culture itself. The narrator is only important as a vehicle through which the message can be delivered. So we see in muralism the author is seldom remembered or even known.

Thirdly the bard attempts to occupy the centre of his or her culture. From our view-point the centre in Northern Ireland terms may seem anything but; however the communities that murals emerge from, we must remember, have been engaged in armed



The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The second part of the report deals with the economic situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The third part of the report deals with the social situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The fourth part of the report deals with the political situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The fifth part of the report deals with the cultural situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The sixth part of the report deals with the religious situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The seventh part of the report deals with the legal situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The eighth part of the report deals with the educational situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The ninth part of the report deals with the health situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people. The tenth part of the report deals with the environment situation and the position of the various groups. It is a very interesting and informative study of the country and its people.

conflict though not everyone within these communities has been engaged in this. Thus especially with republican murals people are exhorted to partake in resistance but never criticised for not. For example, the mural of Bobby Sands with accompanying quote "everybody has his or her part to play."

Fourthly as Fiske and Hartley state, the bardic voice is oral, that is not literate. Muralism does not enter into the high art discussions of the literate. Such discussions are not appropriate to a medium unconcerned with authorship or qualities of genius. The oral tradition allows easy access for those who would otherwise be excluded by investments that are linked to high culture. Therefore the murals do not enter the reflexive world of high art but state clearly their message to a mass audience.

Fifthly, the bardic role is normally a positive one that works dynamically to draw the audience to its central position thus when being asked to support armed struggle we are never shown the brutal consequences of such a course. Instead armed struggle is portrayed as an abstract of heroic images apart from and unconnected to its implications. Fiske and Hartley note that this role also uses strategies of, 'like us-ness' which entail finding equivalents in other cultures in order to justify our own. Clearly the internationalist murals of republicanism portray this, clearly stating implicitly that "if armed struggle is correct elsewhere we are also correct in our actions."

Sixthly, the bardic function is concerned with myths. These mythologies are selected and combined into sequences. The emblems of a mural containing the flags of Ulster beside the Union Jack for instance, tell us that not only is the bard/muralist in favour of the link with the union but points to his conditional acceptance of



that union as long as it fulfills his political ambitions. Link these to an armed figure and we read that only by fighting for 'the flags' will we be able to hold on to the gorgeous splendour.

But to explain how murals function begs the question: why did the muralist not turn to a simpler more versatile medium capable of reaching a wider audience? That is to say, why did they choose murals as their main medium?

Obviously the answer is that for those who employ murals as their means of communication, no other medium was available. However in other societies murals have been rejected by politically articulate groups as a worthwhile form of propaganda. The Cubans rejected murals as being "too realistic, heavy, and rhetorical in style, and too expensive, and permanent in medium." (Marxism and Art, p.302)

In this way the Cubans have followed in the foot-steps of the Soviet Union who also rejected murals as a worthwhile form of propaganda believing instead that only film, posters, and certain forms of theatre are useful for propaganda purposes. (Berger, 1969, Stermer, p.xxvii)

However, these decisions were based on the notion that only mass-media could achieve mass-mobilizations. This denies the possibility that mass-mobilization can be built through a series of smaller mobilizations. In this case local media such as murals have a worthwhile role.

The communist party of Spain for instance, developed a simple system of painting single letters on walls in opposition to Franco's regime. (Basset, 1983, p.195) Mostly nobody knew what these letters meant except party members. Their function was not to

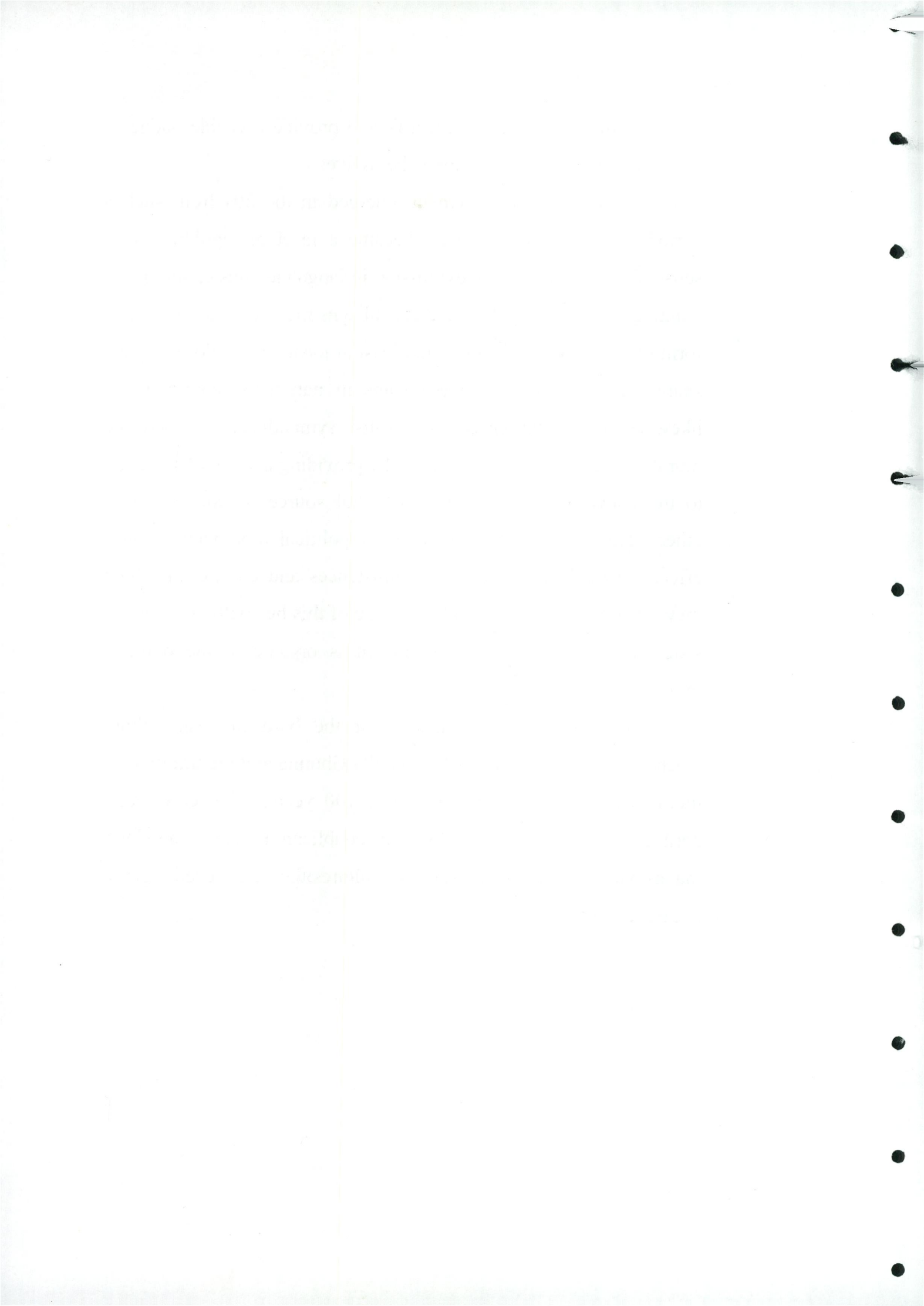




win over the masses but to identify and provide a visible badge of resistance among party members themselves.

The republican movement emerged in the 80s from such a period of containment. Culture became a facet of republicanism's self-definition and cultural expression in language, music, and mural painting. For both loyalists and republicans murals are an important form of political mobilization, not least at local level. Not everyone shares the aspirations of republicans in nationalist communities; likewise not all unionists are loyalist sympathizers. Therefore murals became crucial in two ways by providing a sense of cohesion to the converted and act as a potential source of conversion to others. However like any medium of political mobilization, their effectiveness depends on the circumstances and context in which they are used. Perhaps the only measure of this lies with, as Gramsci states, the degree to which muralism is organic to the political movement concerned.

Given the extensive history of the bard in Irish culture reaching back to Cathal Bui Mac Giolla Ghunna and the tradition of mural painting in Ireland for almost 100 years, whether through heritage or practice both loyalist and republican muralists can claim that as bards of their own respective cultures they are indeed organic to their cultures.



## CONCLUSION

From its foundations the state of Northern Ireland has been at the centre of a conflict that disputes history, events, and interpretations. This conflict has swollen over generations to become a propaganda war of great sophistication and depth. Thus it is impossible to name the state or demographic area without at once becoming embroiled in this war. For example, even the words Northern Ireland, northern Ireland, the North, Ulster, or the six counties, all have connotations beyond what they attempt to name.

Even before its foundation, the muralists of unionism were creating luscious monuments in celebration of the alliance of orangism whose triumph would lead to its vindication in state-hood.

Stiff and inflexible, these murals were an uncanny reflection of the monolithic, semi-feudal state. Their intention was to commemorate rather than explain and interpret. Therefore the murals of unionism can be read as tomb-stones that tell of the demise of a philosophy and culture whose basis in history had already passed even before the state was founded.

The death of King William III in the murals of Northern Ireland, as he surely has, is a story of a society with a positive and enthusiastic view of itself, content and secure, crumbling into the insecurity of its siege mentality, unable to see the possibility of change as anything other than threatening.

Unfortunately I feel the positive aspects of Protestant culture in Ireland, of independence and self-reliance, have been lost in defence of an empire that no longer exists and ascendancy that no longer is relevant. Thus the revolutionary doctrine of Protestant





libertarianism has been reduced, without a context, to the distorted image of an aspiring sectarian serial killer staring menacingly from the gable walls of Belfast or Derry.

Perhaps no more than their Protestant countrymen, nationalists have suffered from the distortion that is northern Ireland; cut-off from their heritage and their cultural roots since the time of that culture's greatest renaissance. Silenced and banished to the ghettos for 70 years, when next they would make their voice heard, it would be the shrill scream of a victim prepared to do whatever was necessary to escape its oppressor.

The murals of northern Ireland tell the horrible story of a set of peoples trapped in a history that is ultimately not of their making or in their control. It has been traditionally the needs of colonialism which has provided the dynamic force for this story and as with any horror story only the author can bring it to a conclusion. So it is that nationalists have not the power to end their oppression nor have unionists the ability to escape their own 'raison-d'etre' by committing the political suicide that would deliver both to a new identity.



Child of the revolution



Mo bhuíochas do Gerry Walker as a chomhairle is cuidiú