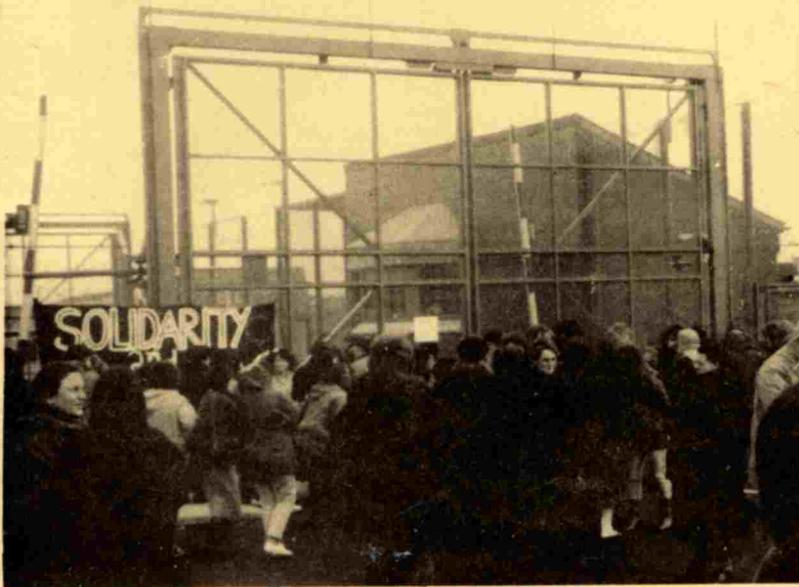
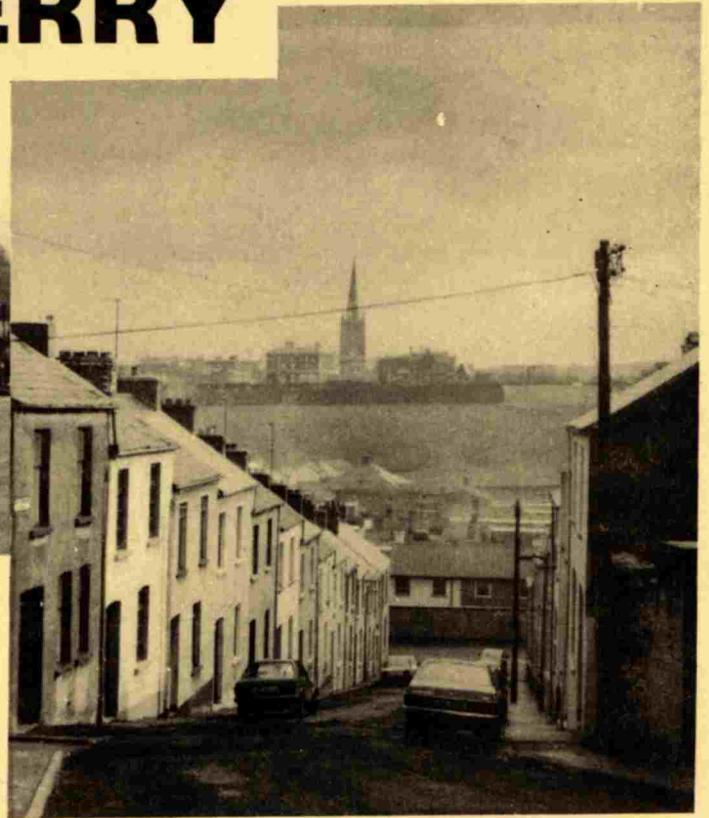
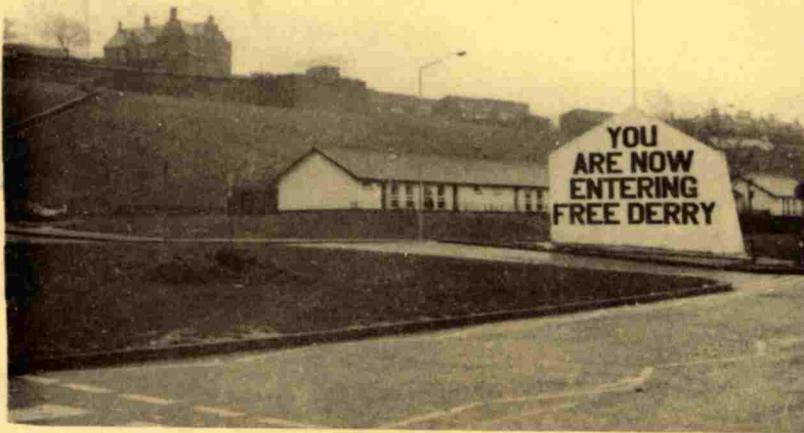


4 DAYS IN BELFAST AND DERRY



**Views of life in the
north of Ireland**



**Brighton International
Womens Day Delegation '88**



This booklet is dedicated to Charly Newton who died on July 29th this year. Charly joined the Brighton Women and Ireland group in 1987. She took part in the 1987 delegation to Ireland and she was a steward on this year's delegation. Charly was involved in the initial stages of producing this booklet and wrote the article 'Long Kesh Visit'.

Charly is greatly missed by us, both as an activist and as a friend. She was a very active member of the B.W.I.G. and contributed a great deal to the group. Charly thought it was important that we should be able to have a laugh as well as to be serious in meetings! We will miss her commitment, enthusiasm and sense of humour, her warmth and her consideration for people's feelings.

At the end of May this year Charly was diagnosed as having lung cancer. From that time until she died, she showed enormous courage. Her positive attitude to trying to cure herself of her illness and to life has been a great inspiration to many people. We miss you Charly.

Acknowledgements & Thanks

We want to sincerely thank all the people in Belfast and Derry who made the delegation possible - either by organising events, visits and workshops or by putting us up in their homes, talking to us and sharing their experiences with us.

4 Days in Belfast and Derry

Impressions of Life in the North of Ireland

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Brighton International Womens Day
Delegation 1988

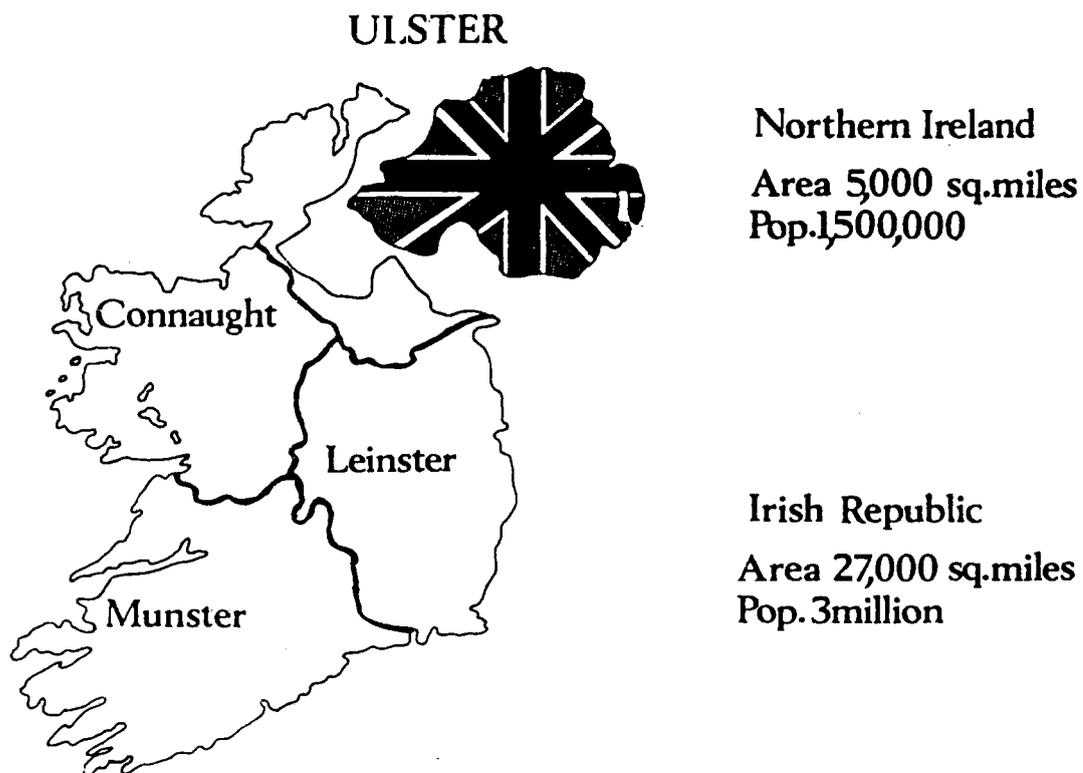
Seeing for ourselves

This International Women's Day 15 women from Brighton joined women from all over England and Wales to spend a few days in the North of Ireland. We went to Ireland to "see for ourselves", and this process went on the whole 3 days we were there, at workshops, on visits to community groups, in discussions with the people we were staying with or simply by being on Belfast or Derry streets. The delegation was organised by Sinn Fein and billeted in nationalist areas of Belfast and Derry - the Brighton group stayed in Ardoyne and New Lodge, and in the Bogside in Derry. We also supported a picket, held to protest at the strip-searching of Republican women prisoners in Maghaberry jail.

The women from Brighton came from a variety of backgrounds, including a woman who has been active in the peace movement for 30 years, Labour Party members, a NALGO member, a writer, and activists in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Brighton Lesbian Action, 2 women from Deal

also joined the Brighton group - a member of Women against pit closures who was very involved in the miners' strike, and a member of the National Union of Seafarers which is presently on strike.

The articles in this booklet are the impressions and experiences of these 17 women during the three days we spent in Belfast or Derry. They are individual accounts and, as such, reflect the variety of politics and ideas in the group as well as people's differing experiences over the weekend. However, one factor common to all of us is the enormous impact the visit made - as one delegate said "My life will never be the same again." We want to pass on to other people what we have learnt and seen for ourselves, and hope this booklet will help people understand more about what life is like for people living in the 6 counties of Northern Ireland.



"It's A War"

Liz French comes from the mining community in Deal, Kent. She played a leading role in the miners' strike as a member of Kent Women Against Pit Closures. Her husband, Terry, was jailed for his part in this strike. This was her first visit to Northern Ireland.

"Most of all, what my visit to Belfast did is make me realise that it's actually a war - not just a fight or a struggle, a war. I could've just sat and cried for them all - they must be the bravest people I've ever met, to be able to cope with it. I had a feeling I was so small against these women who were so brave and strong.

They don't have the basic liberty of walking the streets - it's a human right to go out and walk on your own streets, and they can't there, that's been taken away from them. One lad I talked to, he'd been pulled in by the army. he was just out walking, and they stopped him and wanted to know what he was doing. He said "I'm going for a walk". They took him in for 12 hours for no reason at all other than that he'd been out walking. It's an everyday thing there to be questioned about where you've been and where you're going. You can't walk down your own street.

What really made me angry is the way the squaddies have taken over people's houses for their barracks. I walked up the Falls Road, and if you could see, down a side alley, it was all blocked off, they'd taken a section of people's homes for their fort. Little parts of the community are all squashed together, with these forts looking over them. They've got video cameras that see up and down the street, and look into people's houses. They can see the colour of your shirt, and what you're having for tea. That sickens me.

There are barricades at the end of the street. To get into a pub, just to socialise, you have to press a bell and get through big barbed wire doors. I don't know how they cope with it. Going to where I stayed, we had to cross the Shankill Road. The taxi driver suddenly went really fast and a woman crossed herself and said "I hope the lights aren't red". I didn't know what it was about. Later on I found out it's a main target area for shootings at night, from loyalists on the Shankill Road.

I met this lad, a postman. He said in the post office, catholics and protestants work together. He wanted to work together, but said it was hard. They asked him to go and do the Shankill Road - he refused, he wouldn't do it. I'd say that was intimidation.

I went to the funerals. The harassment of those families was terrible, when all they wanted to do was bury them in dignity, and they aren't allowed to do that.

I've thought about Ireland before, and I've talked about it. People at home aren't very interested - they have a closed mind about it. I've said it about 3 times since I've been there - I want to pick my town up, shove it down there and say "there, how would you feel about that?". I'm sure they'd change their minds quick. People don't understand, and it's not put across in England. We had a whole fortnight about the Eniskillen bombings, but it's never portrayed the other way round about what's happening to them. I'm not saying it's good, what they did, but you never get to hear the other side of it.

I already knew that as workers we're suppressed, we've got no rights at all in the law courts. They all appoint themselves, you'd never get a judge who's socialist, it's a closed shop for them. We've already experienced police coming into our home, breaking in, pinning Terry down. This is what you get for being a miner in England. If our strike had gone on, they'd have come in with guns like they do out there. They're using more and more tactics from Northern Ireland on our own streets. The court cases with Terry were awful, but in comparison to Larry Marley, it wasn't. He did 10 years, was on the blanket and then they shot him. Seeing someone in a worse situation, what they've done for the cause, me and Terry we're like learners."

Four days in Belfast

I can't think of anything beautiful to say about Belfast. It's a shabby, bomb-scarred city, marred by rolls of barbed wire and check points in the street. West Belfast is one of the saddest places I've ever seen. With over 80% unemployment, social security paid at a lower rate than in England and fuel bills 40% higher, the poverty suffered by the predominantly Catholic population has to be experienced to be believed.

I went to Northern Ireland as part of an International Women's Day delegation to 'bear witness' to the situation there. Although I went with the vague idea that the British Army shouldn't be there, I hadn't bothered to think too much about it. It was with a shock that I got off the boat into what is, without doubt, an occupied country.

The day another woman and I went downtown for a coffee and a look at the shops to get the feel of the city as a whole, and an armoured Saracen filled with soldiers training weapons on all of us rumbled through the pedestrian precinct, was the day I realised what it must have been like in France during the Second World War. And we were playing the Nazis!

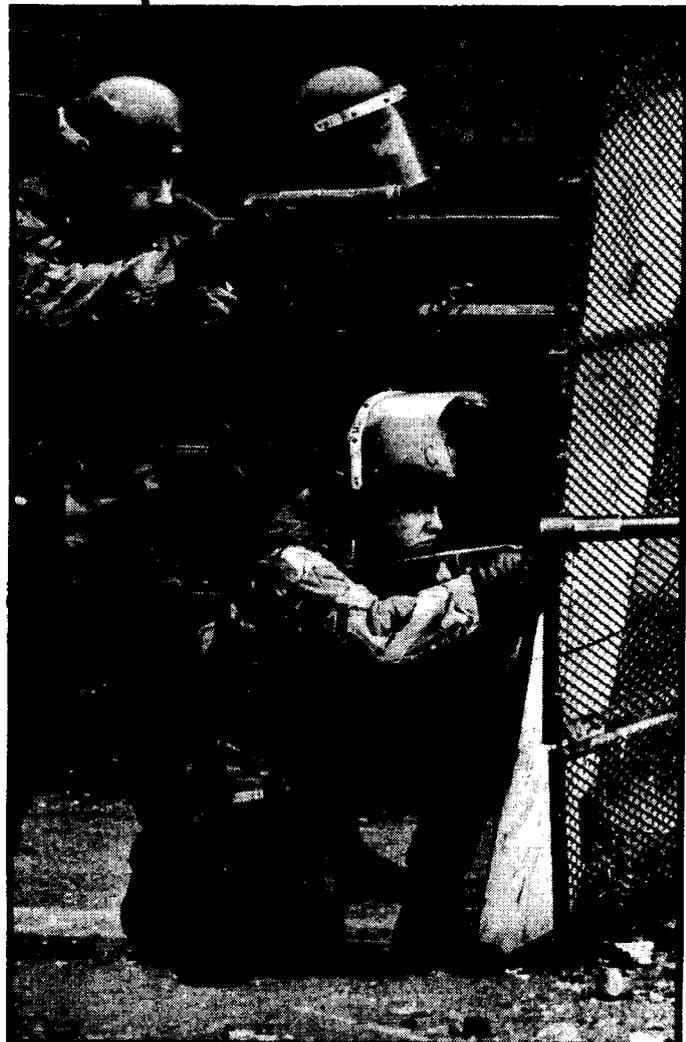
The struggle in Belfast is not about religion. It's about a native people fighting for their independence after 800 years of domination by a foreign power. It's about the right of the Irish people to celebrate their culture and language and not be Anglicised against their will. It's about the working class wanting a bigger slice of the cake. The war in Northern Ireland IS a war. The IRA enjoy massive support as freedom fighters and if their followers are mainly Catholic and the pro-British side is mainly Protestant, that is basically incidental, except to rabble-rousers. As several Catholics told us, the Church has lost the respect of the people because they have recognised it as just another institution trying to control their minds and lives.

And the myth of the British Army being some sort of neutral peace-keeping force is just that, a myth. As our hostess, Marie, told us bitterly, "It wouldn't have gone the way it has if, when they brought in internment, they'd treated both sides equally. But they didn't, and we knew from then on whose side the army was on".

People I talked to admitted that if the army went there would probably be a blood-bath. They admitted that some men on both sides probably had vested interests

in keeping the fighting going but basically they wanted the army out because it was an Irish problem and they wanted the right to sort it out for themselves.

"It's none of your business", was the common refrain, and I had to agree with them. The night we got to Belfast a bomb went off round the corner. The next day, two twelve year old girls told us all about it and about the knee-capping carried out on a thief and about the entire social and political situation. Generation upon generation is growing up politically sophisticated and primed for armed struggle. It can be no worse in the Lebanon or Palestine. "What can we do?", I asked in my embarrassment at being a visitor in the midst of this tragedy. "It's great your being here," was the reply. "We want as many people as possible to see for themselves".



A Peace Activist's view

I landed back from Northern Ireland traumatised, despairing and full of tears, - a state of mind not eased by the news of the Gibraltar shootings and the week's consequent spiral of violence. I had always prided myself on being a political animal yet four days in Belfast had done more to jolt me into some understanding of the 'Irish problem' than some 40 years of desultory theoretical reading, discussion etc. Is theory, then, even if allied to imagination, quite inadequate? Do we have to experience events and situations firsthand to be stung into an awareness leading to action? I suspect we do and this is why history (or at least progress) has moved so frustratingly slowly. TV has introduced a new factor the immediacy and potency of images projected on our TV screen are the next best thing to personal experience: hence the increasing demand for consorship of some of these images, whether in Botha's South Africa or Thatcher's Britain.

I had gone to Belfast impelled, like many others among the women, by a gut feeling that the British troops should not be there. But I wanted to see the situation for myself. What impressed itself most deeply on me was not just the violence implicit in the military presence but the much subtler institutionalised violence. This was clearly visible in the barren landscape of alienation and deprivation of West Belfast, epitomised by the boarded up shops and empty premises of the Falls Road and the utter dereliction of the Divis Flats. Not a tree, not a blade of grass, not a glimpse of natural beauty - the only beauty in the caring attitude and dedication of the community workers we met whose projects themselves now face the institutionalised violence of political vetting which can lead to grant cuts, dismissal of workers etc.

One of the workshops on culture revealed very poignantly the violence perpetrated on a people by the imposition of an alien culture - of how the continuous de-grading and downright suppression of Irish language, history, aspirations results in a sense of having no value, of being inferior, even a 'non person'.

Two visits outside the planned itinerary caused complex reactions. The first one was mid-morning Mass on Sunday in the Cathedral next to the Divis: it gave an obvious sense of peace, value and dignity to the celebrants.

Disappointingly, the priest in his sermon dealt only with personal, family situations of protest. Perhaps the congregation was intended to make the transference for itself. The second visit was to a Non Violent Direct Action Training Conference in the Belfast Friends Meeting House where the discussion, full of vague 'do good', Christian intentions seemed widely remote from the political reality of life off the Falls Road; and where we felt like intruders from an alien planet.

The lack of any hard political analysis or discussion over the whole weekend was a weakness of the visit and the main cause of my despair and frustration on returning home. Ways out of the impasse of spiralling violence with the lengthening list of IRA 'martyrs' were never tackled. 'Troops Out' - O.K. But after that? There was no opportunity to discuss solutions. True, a meeting with Sinn Fein councillors had to be cancelled and this might have filled the gap.

However to experience a problem is the first step to understanding: on this count the visit was a total success. There can surely not be enough of them - not only by groups of women but also by those elected to govern us - how could it be that only Eric Heffer and, days later, 40 other Labour MPs seemed to understand the significance of the Gibraltar shootings enough to protest at the way they were carried out, even following the Stalker affair?

Finally, as a peace activist, I cannot help but see the Northern Ireland situation - infinitely complex though it is, with roots far back in history - as part of world-wide aggression and attempts at domination, stretching from Central America and battles for self determination to the islands of the Pacific as they struggle to be nuclear-free.





Can't We See What's Going On?

I'd been back 6 hours, had some sleep, a bath, food to eat and I became aware of this anger. A deep seated anger. At first I didn't work out why I was so angry - and then it struck me. I'm angry that nothing has changed. People are going about their business as normal and every thing is exactly as it was 4 days ago. I think of the people who are politically active and who campaign and protest against Reagan's funding of the contras in Nicaragua and against the apartheid state of South Africa but seem to ignore the British state which is directly responsible for the wholesale militarized, calculated murder and oppression of the Irish people in their own country just, a few miles away from England's coast.

Our army, our state, our government is involved in a war and no one seems to care. Having seen what's happening in the 6 counties, on our return I expected to see people out in the streets, agitating, marching, waving banners and shouting 'no' to what's going on, bringing the government to its knees over the unjustifiable war that's going on in our name and for which we bear responsibility. Instead I see life going on as normal, people going about their everyday business with a casual indifference and I feel really angry - can't they see what's going on? Don't they know?.

For me, there wasn't one particular thing that struck me about my experience

of the delegation, nothing that highlighted the situation and made me think - 'yes, that's it, that is what this is all about'. No, it was the overwhelming totality of it all - meeting people and knowing that their everyday reality was one of living in a warzone under constant harassment, intimidation and fear of death.

I stayed in a relatively small catholic working class area called New Lodge bounded on all sides by protestant areas: our street was on the edge of the area and our house was on the side of the street nearest to the protestant area. Railways marked the boundary at the end of the street. There was a real sense of living in a close community with people leaving their doors open, neighbours, friends and children popping in and out without even knocking.

The area was frequently patrolled by the army and RUC and was the target of heavy surveillance and information gathering. As one woman I spoke to said "it's like living in a concentration camp here". Later she said of living in New Lodge "life's a gamble - when you go out of the front door you don't know whether you'll be shot dead or not".

The initial shock of hearing those words and then beginning to understand the effect that that perspective must have on all aspects of peoples' lives. The insecurity of it all- how do you plan for

tomorrow, the next day, the week after, next year?. I began to understand the extent of it all. The kids playing freely on the streets, vulnerable targets for the RUC, the army and the loyalists on the other side of the railings. Looking out of the house windows through wire mesh placed there by the council because windows were getting broken so often. Looking out from our bedroom onto a huge corrugated iron fence erected to protect the back of the house.

Realising that people couldn't simply walk from New Lodge to another area nearby because it wasn't safe for them to do so, but had to rely on the limited protection of a taxi; discovering that there were only certain taxis that it would be advisable to take. Knowing that the price paid for the open friendly atmosphere of New Lodge was that loyalist gunmen could walk in and shoot a person dead as they lay in their bed and had done so 7 weeks previously in the next street parallel to ours. The video cameras and wire mesh and electronic security gates outside the pubs; witnessing that even then the dead can't be buried in peace but are accompanied by the brutality of the state forces. Beginning to get a grasp of the social condition- the 75% unemployed in some catholic areas, people who had never had a job. The politics involved in filling out job application forms which require people to state their nationality - if they write 'Irish' instead of 'British' the application is automatically turned down.

People accepting the most abnormal situations in order to carry on surviving - as we arrived a bomb went off in a nearby street. Our hosts dismissed this as 'a banger for your arrival' and continued putting us at our ease. The high level of tranquiliser usage amongst women, the tiredness in women's eyes, the tensions and contradictions of bringing up children in such a situation, the ability of women to carry on living, the strength necessary for them to go on working in the house, raising kids, socializing and having a laugh under such intolerable pressure, their amazing resistance and determination; but at cost to themselves and their lives, their bodies and spirits.

I talked to a woman who had served on the local Sinn Fein committee and I began to realise that our state doesn't have a hope in hell in the face of the resistance of the Irish people and the extent of that resistance. That it is inevitable given their daily experiences. She said of New Lodge - "everyone may not be a member of

the IRA but they are all IRA sympathisers" and the folly of assuming that any solution can be achieved by using the army and paramilitary repression. How can there be when 3 year olds see their mother a prisoner of war? When the toddler in our house who can't yet talk properly shouts support for the IRA? When the woman we stayed with speaks of her son being lifted off the streets by the army, repeatedly beaten and then released without being charged so that speaking of the soldiers she says "As far as I'm concerned they can go home in black boxes 6 feet long" said dispassionately with a resigned acceptance of the only foreseeable answer to the army's continued presence in the 6 counties.

We also talked of how the war involves not only fighting against the British, but also involves the Irish working out and creating alternatives to the structures imposed upon them. The fact that the I.R.A. grew out of the need to defend catholic communities from the armed attacks of the RUC and protestant loyalists; the part Sinn Fein plays in the crackdown on 'antisocial behaviour' such as glue sniffing, joy riding, burglary and sexual assault, dealing with the offenders without recourse to the RUC. I felt inspired to hear how people were working out alternatives to the state's law and order system whilst fighting such oppression.

I bought a badge whilst I was in Ireland, it says "England get out of Ireland" and whilst I don't believe England's withdrawal of troops will bring about the end of the conflicts, I do believe that the conflicts cannot begin to be resolved until our occupation and colonialist control of Ireland is brought to an end.



Belfast black taxi, Ballymurphy

Northern Ireland-Britain's El Salvador

Having only lived in the South of England since I moved to Britain, it was easy to believe I was living in a western developed country, but what I saw in Belfast made me change my mind. I stayed in a working class catholic neighbourhood and the people I met there were just like any other third world people I have come across who struggle to keep their old culture alive and who are being systematically oppressed.

It is as if the British government (Tory and Labour) has been intent on genocide for centuries and the last twenty years' war against the catholic minority in Ulster is yet another attempt to deny thousands of people the right to work and manage their own lives.

This small group of people have, for the last twenty years, been enduring levels of surveillance that even Pinochet would like to use in Chile but is unable to; levels of poverty which are the highest in northern Europe and levels of discrimination which bring to mind those suffered by the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the blacks in South Africa. In spite of all this they have organized armed resistance against one of the most powerful, sophisticated and experienced armies in the world and have not been defeated for twenty years.



Mural, Falls Road.

It saddens me when every time I bring up the 'Irish question' in conversation; people invariably say "It is a situation too complicated to even discuss". I suppose it is because I am not English and I see it from outside that I don't find the Irish situation all that complicated.

Let's face it, the existence of the border is itself the biggest gerrymander possible. The six counties it enclosed have no point or meaning except as the largest area which the protestant tribe could hold against the catholics. Protestant supremacy is the only reason the state exists. As such the state itself is an immoral concept. It therefore had to be maintained from the beginning, by immoral means: the fiddling of internal boundaries, the steady pressure on catholics to emigrate by making it hard for them to live and work; the army and the police bullying, the supergrass strategy, the army and RUC shoot-to-kill policy, the kamikaze-type attacks on unarmed mourners at funerals etc.

Since protestant supremacy is the only reason for the existence of Ulster the notion of equality for catholics and protestants, as the civil rights movement proposed in the sixties, makes no sense, it does not apply. Dismantle the apparatus of protestant supremacy and you have destroyed Northern Ireland's only justification for being a state separate from the rest of Ireland.

For the status quo to continue in Northern Ireland the existence of Unionist paramilitary organisations is essential, but who are these people? How can they appear to defend the right of an oppressed group against an invading army? Are they there to defend the people against a ruthless dictatorship?. No. Unfortunately their role is as sordid as the role of the right wing death squads in El Salvador and Chile. Whose orders are they following? Who are they defending? The party in power in Northern Ireland since 1921, the Unionist party which is so far to the right of the present Westminster government that they called Margaret Thatcher a traitor for starting talks on the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The existence of both sides, on the one hand the oppressed, impoverished and discriminated groups and on the other the extreme right wing elite with absolute power remind me strongly of a classic third world country.

"Its Like A Jail"

One of the things that struck me during my time in Belfast is the apparent use of land use planning in the redevelopment of nationalist areas, with the aim to break up communities and make them easier to control by the 'security forces'.

The Housing Executive is the housing authority for the whole of the 6 counties and is directly responsible to and dependent on the Department of the Environment for funding. This unique housing body was set up in 1972, taking control in this area from local government. It was set up as a direct response to the civil rights movement at the time, the abuse of power by loyalist councils and overt discrimination against the Catholic communities in the allocation of housing, repairs and maintenance.

It is undoubtedly true that the houses that have been built since the establishment of the Housing Executive, have been top quality, but as one resident of the Short Strand said "They're 25 years too late".

The Short Strand is a small nationalist enclave in the heart of Loyalist East Belfast. It consists of a community of 2,500 people and prior to redevelopment the area could only be described as a 'Victorian slum'.

There are many areas which the residents of the area are concerned about since the redevelopment started. The most obvious concern is the belief that the security forces have direct influence and control in the planning of the area, this is apparent in several ways.

The old system of small streets of terraced houses has been changed and the area has been divided into 5 separate estates. Two of these estates, Clondeboye and Loch Lea, are cul-de-sacs, with only one entrance and one exit and surrounded by a high wall. The clear result of this is the ease with which the security forces can seal off the estates with the use of just one saracen at each exit. The effect on the community is clearly described by Margaret:

"It's really awful the way its been built; like a fort. It makes us so cut off, but that's why it's been designed like that. It's like a jail."

Margaret goes on to say that:

"If anything ever happens round here the place is just closed, just like that. It's unbelievable and frightening....Even in the past couple of months the police have been stopping cars from getting into the area and carrying out sporadic raids. It's frightening to see how easily that we can be isolated."



the so-called 'Peace Line' dividing Protestant and Catholic areas.

Here she is referring to the area as a whole as all exits and entrances bar 2 have been closed so there are literally only 2 ways in and out of the area.

A further effect of this strategy is the break up of the community. Whereas before people didn't close or lock their doors now more people do. Each new estate has become a separate community of its own and even within each community people are less likely to be open or to be in and out of each other's homes.

"If you break up the community spirit you're half way towards controlling it and then if you break it up into small easily contained groups you've more or less got total control over it."

Attempts have been made by groups in the community, particularly Sinn Fein, to encourage people to get involved in the community centre and in an Irish Nursery. A meals on wheels service has also been set up. However all funds from the council were cut off as they believed that these activities were furthering the aims of paramilitaries. The authorities are clearly very worried when any group of people organise for themselves. This poses a much greater threat to the establishment than any political party.

Another way that the residents believe that the security forces are attempting to isolate the community is the building of a security wall (or as they are euphemistically referred to 'environmental improvement walls'). They believe that these walls were built not to protect them but to isolate the area further. In reference to this, Margaret's 6 year-old daughter asked :

"Mummy, is that wall to keep the 'orangies' out?"

"No love, that's to keep us in."

And this is confirmed by Peter Robinson, Loyalist MP for East Belfast, who called for a complete Berlin type wall around the Short Strand : 'that Republican Stinkhole' in his words.

The wall has not achieved any level of security for the people living in the area. Anyone who has been assassinated has been assassinated inside the area and invariably each time there has been a striking absence of RUC patrols.

There is also a striking absence of anything else in the area apart from houses, high walls and an imposing RUC station. There are no shops, except small corner shops, no playground or other facilities for children, no health centre or chemist, no youth clubs or entertainment for adults apart from 3 drinking clubs and, most importantly no jobs. Short Strand is in the shadow of Harland and Wolff and not one person from the area has a job there. There is the Sirrocco works and Shorts just down the road and the situation is the same there. The unemployment rate runs as high as 90%.

Residents in the Short Strand are convinced as to the reasons for the attempts by the security forces and the Housing Executive to break up the community. They clearly see this as a cynical attempt to destroy the real support and acceptance of the Republican struggle and the I.R.A. that is present in most of the nationalist areas in the 6 counties. They see it as part of counter-insurgency measures highlighted in Frank Kitson's book which spells out these strategies.



Mural, Ballymurphy

Meeting The Peace People

I have been active in the peace movement for as long as I can remember, and in the Brighton Non-violent Direct Action (NVDA) Network since it was founded five years ago. As such, I've been aware of an increasingly authoritarian stance by successive governments. So I was glad to be invited by the Women and Ireland group to see the situation in N.Ireland at first hand.

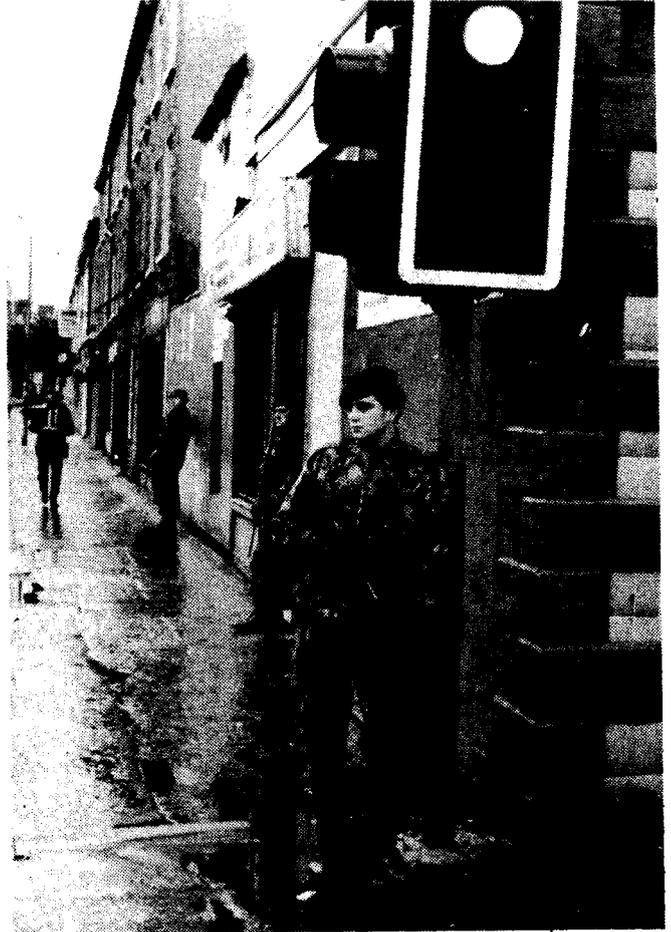
Brighton NVDA Network is one of many similar groups throughout England, Wales and Scotland. These loosely-knit groups are mostly Anarchist/Libertarian socialists who are confronting the state and who are working with a wide range of other political and religious groupings. Whether non-violence is a matter of pragmatism or principle for us as individuals, this is on the whole a workable coalition, since we share the same struggle against militarism and imperialism.

So I was intrigued to read in a network mailing this February that a group of N.Ireland peace activists had joined the network, and I resolved to meet them if I could, while over there on the delegation. It seemed extraordinary that such a group should exist at all (and be operational) in the terms that we understand NVDA, without us having heard about it. Who could these superheroes be, who would confront the might of the British state and the paramilitary organisations with the steadfastness and dignity needed to inspire a non-violent uprising of the people? Were we going to meet a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King - or a load of wallies? I rang up one of the three contacts and ended up being invited to the plenary session of the first (!) NVDA conference to be held in N.Ireland, which coincidentally was happening on the Saturday of the delegation's visit.

Three women from the delegation took up this invitation. It was a salutary experience to step away, for a couple of hours, from the deprivation, oppression and mutual support of nationalist West Belfast into a world of bland ignorance and apathy more normally associated with England.

Having walked through the centre of town and been astonished at the surreal sight of people shopping and pretending

everything was normal; that there weren't giant gates guarded by armed men ready to immobilise the city at a moment's notice every hundred yards or so, it was a relief to arrive at the Friends Meeting House with its sense of quiet and cleanliness. Perhaps we'd find some sanity here.



Some hope. The place was full of middle-aged grey-suited men (one of whom we later found out was a Unionist Councillor), plus a few younger men and women, all of whom, despite having spent a whole day in workshops together, seemed scared to open their mouths for fear of offending each other.

We introduced ourselves and were greeted very coolly. Later I read one of their discussion papers which set the scene: "You are at a demonstration about something you believe in strongly. People are gathering and a group turns up that you don't like the look of. They are troublemakers. Do you leave?". When we entered that quiet space, the expression in most of those peoples' eyes said the same thing. We were the trouble makers, intent on doing the one thing they feared

most: upsetting the status quo. During the plenary discussion, we were privileged to hear some choice examples of what we had heard referred to derisively as "the language of reconciliation" and what an education it was! Examples:

For the first time since our arrival in Belfast, the terms "Catholic" and "Protestant" were being used, rather than "nationalist" and "loyalist".

Also for the first time, there seemed to be an unassailable assumption that there were "2 sides", and that nothing could be done about it except develop, through self-help groups, one's personal capacity for non-violence. This contrasted starkly with the rather wistful tone I'd heard from the nationalist women: "Why do they hate us so? Why can't we live together? ".

A particularly striking example was : "Would we feel different on hearing that a child had been killed by a plastic bullet if it was a Protestant child rather than a Catholic one?"

There was an inability to talk clearly about nationalist aspirations as embodied by Sinn Fein. Even those people there with nationalist sympathies seemed embarrassed about these "strange bedfellows" with whom they found themselves in these troubled times.

Most astonishingly, for us, as visitors to a country controlled by a very evident, army (whether you regard it as an occupying foreign force or not), was that the only mention of violence was in reference to "the paramilitary", by which was exclusively understood those on the nationalist side. We had already noticed a reference to this in a broadsheet I'd been sent, in it the only place they mentioned having picketed to protest against violence, was the Sinn Fein offices.

It was good for us to have been present at this meeting. It made it clearer than ever to us that the ideology and structure of NVDA as we understand it here, is irrelevant in the six counties. These people seemed to be hedging rather than confronting the issue: to be committed to preserving the status quo (represented by the "peacekeeping" British forces) rather than challenging the institutionalised violence in the midst of which they live.

Of all the experiences I had in Belfast, I was most shocked and saddened by this one. In contrast to the solidarity and vision that transformed the squalor of the Divis Flats and the Falls Road into lessons of hope, the "peace movement" was largely a bunch of phonies repeating platitudes it was obvious they didn't believe in.

The overwhelming impression I brought back from the whole visit to Belfast and what made it most disturbing for me was to experience personally just what I had expected before I went there. That is, that the degradation and alienation imposed on the nationalist population differed only in degree, not in quality, from that suffered by the rest of us on the poverty line in Thatcher's Britain, and that the more overt methods of control used there are just around the corner. Active resistance to the State is the key to survival.



Impressions of Derry

To an extent the atmosphere in Derry is more relaxed than it is in Belfast. In Derry the loyalists are in the minority and are therefore much less inclined to carry out sectarian attacks. The relative absence of sectarian violence in Derry makes it clearer to see what Britain's role there means.

It isn't difficult standing in the Bogside and looking around, to see that there is a war going on. On the surface, people walking along the streets seemed to be getting on with their lives, however it soon became clear that their lives are affected at every level by British rule and the presence of the British army.

The Bogside, where we stayed is a nationalist, working class area at the bottom of the hill outside the city walls. The walled city of Derry was built by protestant planters in 1614. Until as recently as the 1940's Catholics weren't allowed to be inside the city walls after dark. If you look up at the wall today the first things you notice are the army observation post completely encased in barbed wire, strategically placed video cameras and a surveillance tower covered with directional microphones which can pick up conversations up to a distance of half a mile. These are just the most obvious ways in which the people of the Bogside are watched over night and day. We were told about microphones dropped

through holes drilled in people's ceilings and about cameras hidden in the headlights of abandoned cars.

The Bogside is the scene of Bloody Sunday, when in 1972, 14 people were shot and killed when the army attacked a peaceful demonstration against internment. We saw the memorial put up to remember the 14 people who were shot. The base of the memorial has bullet holes in it from that day. The size of these holes in the concrete gives some indication of the velocity of the live ammunition used and leaves no doubt about the intention to kill.

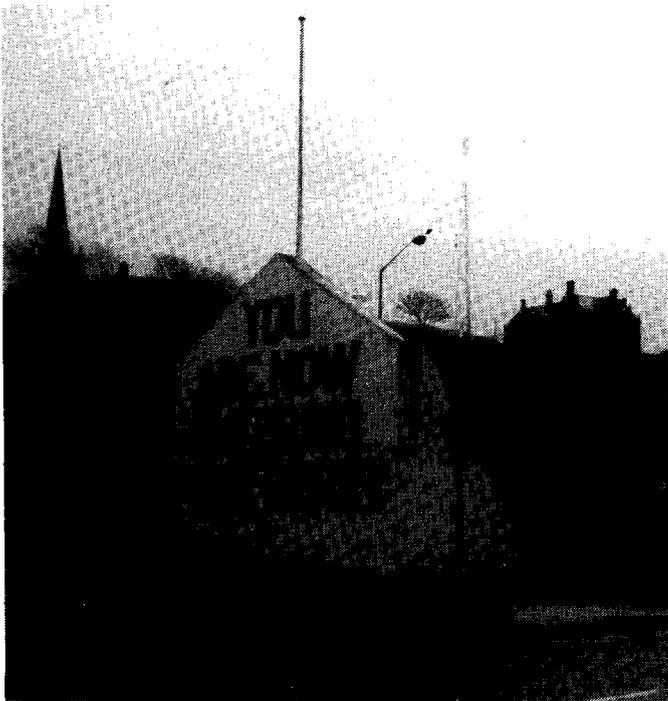
Talking to people who were there that day, we were made very aware of the impact the killings had on this small community. People we met spoke of Bloody Sunday as part of a strategy of trying to instill fear into the nationalist community. This kind of brutality continues. Across the road from the Bloody Sunday memorial, a mural marks the fact that a 12 year old boy was killed by a plastic bullet hitting the back of his head in 1981.

the Bogside described this killing as a calculated attempt by the army to keep children off the street that summer.

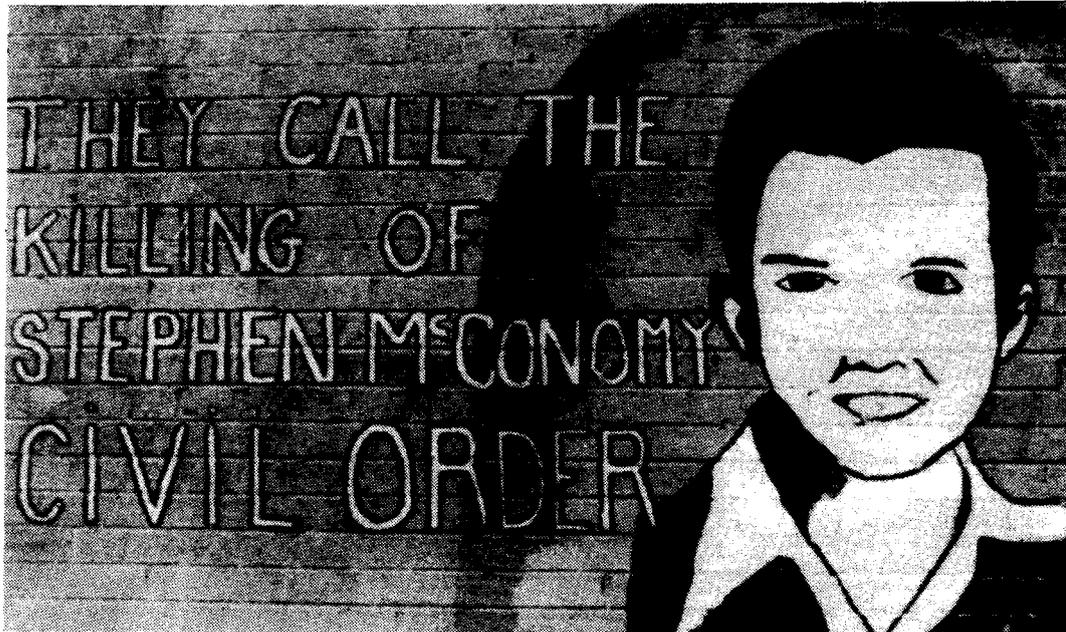
A number of women told us about the funerals last year of Eddy McSheffrey and Patrick Deery - the RUC invaded the funeral procession and surrounded the 200 mourners closest to the coffins and after 20 minutes of holding them there, started viciously battoning everyone inside this ring. Women we met talked of this as yet another part of the policy of terrorising republicans into not showing any resistance. Even though people we spoke to were open about their fear, it was clear that the brutality of the RUC and army has not succeeded in defeating their commitment to Republicanism. Even when confrontation with the 'security' forces is not so direct, as one woman told us, the fear of being shot dead or of being maimed by a plastic bullet is there every time she walks out of her front door. "There's no point in worrying really..." she said, "...if they want to shoot me, they will."

Repression and harassment go on in many different ways. Another constant threat are the regular early-morning raids by the army. One example of the indiscriminate nature of these raids we heard about, was of someone who lived on the eighth floor of the Rossville flats being raided by the army who were looking for a motorbike, although there was no way one could have been brought up there.

Another aspect of the way the war is being waged by Britain can be seen in the



'Free Derry' Wall



Mural, The Bogside

changes which have occurred over the last 20 years in the way the Bogside looks. Before the area was redeveloped, people lived in poor, overcrowded conditions in small terraced houses. The way the Bogside looks now, reflects both the struggles for better housing by the people living there, and the interests of the military.

As soon as the Rossville flats were put up and people started moving in, they also started campaigning against these very badly built new high rise blocks. By now one block has been demolished and most people have moved out of the other blocks. Local young people have smashed up much of the empty blocks which were being used by the army to survey the area. A lot of the new housing originally had flat roofs, completely inappropriate for a place where it rains so frequently. There were many problems such as water running down the walls and damp. Intense campaigning in which local Sinn Fein councillors were active, has resulted in the Housing executive making some improvements, for example roofs have been built on some of these houses now.

However, along with concessions to people's demands, many changes have sinister implications which present new challenges to resistance. The community centre in the Bogside and purpose built houses for old people, both built in the last 10 years, are close to where the Bloody Sunday shootings took place. This is also the area where a lot of fighting against the Brits has occurred. The new

buildings make people reluctant to fight here because of possible damage to an important resource and disturbance to old people. This area has also been cleared of a lot of old houses to make way for a massively wide road with extra wide pavements and lots of parking spaces, although few people own cars. The wide roads make it easy for armoured vehicles to drive through the area, and very difficult for barricades to be put up across streets, or for people to hide amongst the buildings. Blocks of houses are decorated differently, for example one block in red brick, the next in pink pebbledash - which makes it easier to identify specific streets and houses from a helicopter.

The wide open space created by redevelopment leaves the Free Derry wall which proclaims: "You are now entering Free Derry", standing on its own. It was once the end wall of a terrace in a part of the Bogside which the RUC could not enter when the area was held by the nationalists in 1969. The army once half-demolished this symbol of resistance, but local people rebuilt it and regularly repaint it. When we arrived in Derry it was clean, having recently been repainted. On our way back to our billets that night though, we saw that the army had paint-bombed it. They throw crisp bags full of paint at this wall and at the many republican murals in the area. Yet another reminder of the way people are harassed on a day to day basis.

Derry :The Last 20 Years

The couple I stayed with in Derry met in a cinema queue almost 40 years ago. Bob was back from working in England and was very desirable- "I had a bit of money in my pocket!".

The events of the past 40 years have become more significant to me after staying with people who have lived through them.

1988 is the 20th anniversary of the first 'Civil Rights' march in Derry, and a good time to flick through a few dates; of which until a few months ago, I was totally and embarrassingly ignorant. (I don't claim to know much now).

1922 - "The Irish Free State was formally established." (I had no idea that it was so recent - my grandmother would have been 20 at the time.)

1947 - Up until this time a curfew was imposed on Catholics in Derry, they had to be outside the city walls by 6pm in the winter and 9pm in the summer.

1950's - The couple I stayed with lived with 2 other families in a 2- bed roomed house in the Bogside. Unemployment was continually high amongst Catholics in Derry; bearing no relation to the lower unemployment in England.

1968 - On October 5th, a group of about 400 people gathered in Derry for the first "civil rights" march the town had seen. (Although of course not the first demonstration of resistance). Eamonn McCann describes the scene :

"Our route was blocked by a cordon of police and tenders drawn up across the road about 300 yards from the starting point...We noticed that another police cordon had moved in from the rear and cut us off from behind...The two police cordons moved simultaneously on the crowd. Men, women and children were clubbed to the ground. People were fleeing down the street from the first cordon and up the street from the rear cordon, crashing into one another, stumbling over one another, huddling in doorways.

By the next morning, after the television newsreels and the newspaper pictures, a howl of elemental rage was unleashed across Northern Ireland, and it was clear that things were never going to be the same again."

1969 saw RUC attacks on the Bogside and the barricading of the area by inhabitants to protect themselves. John 'Caker' Casey in a moment of inspiration wrote "You are now entering Free Derry" on a gable-end in St Columb's Street.

1969 - The British army came in.

1971 - 9th of August. Internment in Derry..

"In the twenties, the thirties, the forties and the fifties, the RUC had come storming into our areas at night, dragged our people from their beds and taken them off to camps and prison-ships, where they were often held for years. No charge, no trial, nothing. There was not a family in the area which had not had a relative or a neighbour interned. Now it was happening again." (McCann).

1972 - The army fired on a peaceful crowd protesting against internment without trial. 14 were killed in a deliberate attempt to frighten people off the streets. The bullet holes can still be seen in the walls of flats, on curb stones and in concrete flower-beds.

1976 - The end of Prisoner of War status for those jailed on what were previously classed as, (and obviously are) political offences; leading to the absurd result that prisoners convicted of the same offence before 1976 were still POW's, whereas those sentenced after that were criminals.

1982 - The practice of strip-searching is brought in. A procedure which is intimidating and hostile, it is not carried out for security reasons but as a way of breaking the morale of women prisoners and as a further means of punishment - very often for remand prisoners who have not even been convicted. While we were in Derry we went to a workshop given by Isobel Anderson whose sister, Martina, has suffered strip-searching with ludicrous frequency in British prisons; sometimes up to 10 times a day, and on occasion being woken in the night to be strip-searched.

1988 - The events of the past few months, which everyone knows something about, have become more real for me after seeing where

they take place; and meet
-ing ordinary people upon
whom the need to fight
back is imposed.

Two clear books to read are:
Eamonn McCann 'War and an
Irish Town'
& Michael Farrell 'Northern
Ireland: The Orange State'
Both Pluto Press.



Bloody Sunday memorial and Rossville Flats

The Struggle Involves the Entire Community

Visiting Derry as part of the delegation has helped me clarify my support for the struggle for a united Ireland, free of British involvement. Since I've been back, I've found it much easier to see how what is said about Ireland on the TV or in the papers here, is biased and ignores the reasons why Irish people have had no choice but to resort to armed struggle against Britain.

I've been involved in pro-Palestinian solidarity work for 5 years and having visited the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank, I'd had experience of visiting people living under military occupation. The tactics used by the British in the North of Ireland are similar in many ways to those used by the Israelis to attempt to crush resistance in the occupied territories. In Palestine my British nationality gave me a certain feeling of security arising from the knowledge that the Israeli state, keen to keep up good relations with countries like Britain, avoids excessively harassing foreign visitors. Before we'd even left Liverpool I had a taste of how meaningless a UK passport is if you're on the 'wrong side' of the British state when it comes to Ireland. The 'security check' before we boarded the Belfast ferry left me feeling angry at the power of the British state to scare me and make me feel as if, by going on this delegation, I was doing something I shouldn't be doing.

Although politically I've opposed Britain's involvement in Ireland for a while, visiting Ireland was important not only in strengthening my support for the nationalist struggle there but also in making me realise how many of the ideas I'd held about Ireland before I went are the result of growing up in England and subconsciously absorbing distorted images of that struggle. For a start, having to spend 9 hours on the ferry to get to Belfast made me realise that it's much further away than I'd ever thought!.

In Derry I was impressed by how I definitely felt I was in a different country where the Brits are a brutal occupying force. I hadn't quite expected to feel as if I was in Ireland, for some reason I'd thought that the effect in the North, of Britain's long involvement would have been to dissipate people's sense of themselves as Irish. In fact the impression I got from the people we met in Derry, is that the opposite seems to be true. Although many people we met did have connections with cities in England such as Manchester and London, as they or members of their families had gone there through necessity to work or study, I was struck very clearly by how people felt that England or Britain has nothing they want, to offer them. The people we stayed with were cynical about the outcry there has been over growing unemployment in Britain over the last 10 years, with no

recognition being given to the fact that high unemployment has always been a fact of life for catholics in Derry. It was pointed out to us how Dupont's, a multi-national textile company which is a major employer in Derry, pays wages which are high compared to other employers in the city but are in fact lower than wages at any other Dupont plants internationally.

I think what had the greatest impact on me, was being made aware of how the struggle against British rule is being carried out in many different ways and on many different levels as a result of the way British rule is experienced in all areas of the lives of the nationalist community. The strongest impression I got was of how the struggle involves the community as a whole and is not, as it is usually portrayed here, simply about a small minority 'terrorist' element involved solely in a military campaign against the British. We met women involved in the Bogside Creche Campaign - campaigning for childcare facilities in the area, the anti-strip search campaign and campaigns for better housing. We also met women who had produced a video about cervical cancer and women who worked for a video and camera project producing videos and exhibitions about the local community.

Through meeting Sinn Fein activists I was made aware of how Sinn Fein is involved in much more than 'supporting armed struggle' which is virtually the only activity attributed to its members by politicians and the media here. Those we met were involved in all aspects of the lives of their local community. We hear nothing here about the struggles of Sinn Fein politicians just to be able to carry out their duties. We were told of one Derry Sinn Fein councillor who was forced off the council by Loyalists who physically prevented her from getting into council meetings 3 times, as a result of which she lost her seat. The woman councillor who told us this also spoke bitterly about the attitude of SDLP politicians who do little to improve the lives of the nationalist community but are always keen to claim credit for successful council policies which Sinn Fein have initiated

Talking to people from Sinn Fein it was almost a shock to remember that most British politicians would not even consider meeting with a member of this political party. By clinging firmly to their prejudices and attempting to ignore what underlies the politics of Sinn Fein, these politicians, and those who share their beliefs, can only be part of perpetuating the war in Ireland.

"Palestine - It's just like here"

Those of us who went to Derry have already said something about the repression of the nationalist people in diverse and determined ways - through surveillance, raids and other harassment, the maintenance of poor living conditions and changes in the area designed to split up the community and increase control.

Seeing all these things, even for only a couple of days, left me with a much stronger sense of knowing something of the reality of the situation, and a much clearer idea of why people there are fighting so hard against British rule.

Nationalists in Derry are attacked as a community. A recent example of this was during the funerals of two IRA volunteers in Derry last October. The fear and panic but also the unity of the mourners became very vivid as women described how everyone was trying not to panic when the RUC were surrounding them. People were holding on to each other, holding each other up because the level of fear was such that if someone fell over, panic would spread - and they were frightened that it would spread to the RUC, whose attack was described as coldly planned, but uncontrollable once it began. Women we heard speaking about this were visibly shaken and described it as the most frightening thing that has happened in Derry. Even though events like these give some idea of the repression in the 6 counties, it is very clear that people see British involvement and the partition of



The Bogside

Ireland as the main problem, with bearing on issues like housing etc.

People live in poor conditions with few possessions. Most men in Derry are unemployed : this has been the case for many years, and the situation for women, who used to work mainly in shirt factories, has worsened since many factories have closed down.

The people we were staying with tried to impress upon us that despite the fact that we were speaking the same language, they were different from us and had a different culture. The woman we stayed with talked about enjoying the things they do have, like food. We were shown amazing hospitality and despite everything else really enjoyed ourselves when we went out to the pub and to a ceilidh. I was struck by the generosity of people there - in the pub it seemed like someone came round every 5 minutes collecting for prisoners' funds or selling tickets for a Sinn Fein raffle, and every time people dug into their pockets.

It was strange seeing British TV in the context of this busy political culture. Watching the news over there made comparisons with South Africa and Palestine very real to me. It's one thing to know the theory and the facts of similarity, but its another thing to be sitting in someone's front room watching Israeli soldiers attacking a Palestinian funeral, or a report from South Africa, and hearing them say 'Its just like here'.

All this bombardment with British media also means the people we stayed with had a very shrewd idea of most British people's conceptions of Ireland and Irish people. We talked about anti-Irish racism, the pervasive and politically useful (to the British state) ideas that Irish people are stupid and violent. We talked about the irony of republican prisoners being portrayed as mindless thugs, when in reality they spend their time inside educating themselves.

Solidarity amongst republicans is expressed in many ways. The man we stayed with talked to me about his brother in prison who could have come out over Christmas to be with the family, but decided not to, mainly because it would be demoralizing for other republican prisoners who are going to be there for many more years or indefinitely, to hear about what others had done on the outside. Having her son in prison has taken its toll on their mother, he said she had aged 10 years in the 2 years he has been inside.

I was struck by the strong sense of community in the nationalist area we



Army surveillance on Derry City wall

stayed in, and by people's political awareness. Everyone I spoke to had clear ideas about what they are fighting against and what they are fighting for - this doesn't mean everyone agrees about how to do it. Our host talked about class differences and 'armchair republicans' - about some people who vote SDLP rather than Sinn Fein because they have more respect for a middle-class politician than for someone from down the road who is just like them. He also talked about the problems of political theory for republicans, the need to bring people along with them and not get so far removed in their understanding that people can't relate what they are saying to the reality of their everyday lives.

There are also tensions within Sinn Fein. Others want things to move faster. One gay man I was talking to, who is involved in Sinn Fein, was angry about their slowness in taking up lesbian and gay and women's issues : "Its hard being gay here, especially being gay and a republican." He said lesbians get an even tougher time. He introduced us to some young lesbians, two of them had been thrown out of home by their parents. This is something that happens here too and you could think that being lesbian or gay in Derry was just like coming from a small town in Britain. The difference in Derry is that people's families and community are vital to their survival, and it takes a lot of courage to stay and fight as part of your community, and to fight for yourself as a lesbian or gay man within that community.

All in all, visiting the North of Ireland has reinforced my support for the republican cause, and made me more determined to challenge the distorted information we receive about Ireland here from politicians and the media.

Housing Conditions

This is a report on a workshop on housing conditions and town planning that I attended on the Saturday.

In the 1970's Public sector housing for both the loyalist and nationalist working class was in a bad state. 33% of the Nationalist community were homeless. Those housed waited endlessly for repairs and many were living in overcrowded conditions.

Between 1969 and 1970 Loyalist attacks on Catholics produced mass shifts of population which made more people homeless-families ended up in temporary accommodation such as schools, churches and community centres. A mass squatting movement arose from these conditions. In 1979 squatting reached a peak of 6,000. Women organised against discrimination in repairs and against evictions. Some families were eventually accepted as legal tenants and rent was collected. The aim of this was to decrease the level of organisation. The newly legalized tenants still suffered discrimination in repairs.

The payment of Debt Act was brought in in 1971 after the rent and rates strike-a protest against internment. Debts could be deducted at source and even taken from wages by employers. The act has since been extended and money can be deducted from child benefit. People are not rehoused until their debts are repaid.

Conditions in some areas are so bad that diseases such as Polio and Dysentery have reappeared. People have suffered rat bites, and there have been instances of raw sewage bubbling up from the ground

There is a myth that only Nationalist areas are in debt, what's true is that they are more heavily penalized than other areas. The housing in West Belfast is now mainly public sector, and there is a chronic waiting list. Poleglass is a new housing estate built in the early '70's for Catholics. Its standards are better in comparison with other recently built estates. Apparently tenants are selected and generally have a higher income than others.

Redevelopment concerns in the city were military and political. South Belfast Market was an area with a strong sense of community, although housing conditions were bad. The new housing in that area has been up for 20 years - its design follows the typical requirements of the British security forces: one entrance and one exit

make estates easy to seal off, the design of houses enables easy surveillance.

The top storeys of tower blocks in Short Strand, Logan street and New Lodge have been taken over by the army. Army bases are always situated in the middle of communities - in order to use the community as protection. There are countless accidents, children have been knocked over by army jeeps. Ramps normally used to slow down the traffic are put there to suit the army's needs. The level of street lighting is poor, as the army has no need for it as infra-red scanners are used for surveillance.

Visit to Divis

Over the weekend we had the opportunity to visit several different areas. I went to Divis flats, where we were shown round by people from the local Residents' Association.

Divis flats is a complex of council flats just outside the centre of Belfast to the west of the Falls road. The previous site of the flats was called the Pound Loney. People were proud and had a strong sense of community. In 1962 the area was declared a redevelopment area as part of Belfast's first slum clearance programme. Some people were rehoused in Divis.

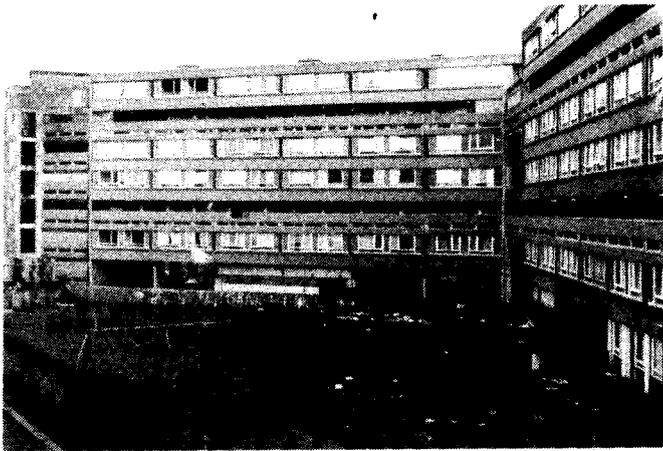
Divis flats look out onto a bare waste ground. Several blocks, 5 storeys high, look out onto each other. The children play on the waste ground, jumping on rusty heaps of cars, and leap frogging over concrete bollards, amongst piles of rubble. The different levels of the flats are reached by dark steep stairways. The flats are built of the cheapest materials including asbestos. As I passed by some ground floor flats I noticed that although they had the appearance of 100% concrete, part of the outer walls of the flats were made of flimsy wood panels.

The flats were overlooked by 'The Tower' - a 19 storey tower block where pensioners live. The British army have taken over the top 2 floors for surveillance purposes. Once a week a Wessex helicopter lands on the roof which causes the entire building to shudder. When the army need the lifts they completely monopolise them, which means that those who live there are unable to use them.

People currently pay £22 per week rent

for a flat in Divis plus £18 per week for electricity and heating - this is paid throughout the year. 99% owe heating, electricity and rent. During the financial year 1985-1986, 195 residents were subject to action under the Payment of Debt Act. (Hansard March 1986).

As soon as people moved into the Divis flat complex they began to organise against the appalling conditions and the Residents Association was formed in 1972. The flats were affected by serious damp problems and the area was plagued with rats due to the inadequate design of the complex and because the council did not clear the refuse chutes often enough. Health has been adversely affected. People suffer from constant flu and viruses and there have been cases of tuberculosis and dysentery. Plus the unknown damage to health due to asbestos. People have been taken to hospital suffering from rat bites, sometimes with the rats still attached to them.



Divis Flats

In 1979 the Divis Demolition committee was formed. As families moved out the committee's strategy was to wreck the empty flats, so that the council could not put new families into Divis. Two organisers were arrested and charged with criminal damage. They were later acquitted - the solicitor defending them told the court that 'people should be paid to live there'.

The residents got maximum publicity by all means - using the press, TV and radio. They went to speak at conferences such as Shelter. Members of the Divis Residents Association have been harassed by the security forces. Activists were arrested and held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act when returning from London where the Town and Country Planning Association had put on an exhibition about Divis. In 1985 the Belfast Housing Executive announced plans to demolish the flats.

The next stage of the campaign was to fight for the right to be rehoused in new

housing on the site of the Divis flats. People did not want the community to be split up and they wanted a say in the type of housing and how the demolition would take place.

With money that they had been given by trust funds they negotiated to buy land to build a community centre and workshops to house co-operatives that they are already running in Divis. These produce goods to sell to finance the playgroups and playcentre.

We were taken round Divis and shown the Residents' Association offices and Adult Education. We saw some of the craft facilities such as machine knitting. At present none of the Residents Association workers are paid, although they have in the past been funded for a years part-time worker.

When asked if the council gave them any money - we were told that they used to pay for their newsletter but don't any more!

We visited the play group and the play centre, which was situated like the adult Education, in an unoccupied flat. A few of the workers were funded through an ACE project, a yearly contract similar to YTS/Community Programme schemes. The latest achievement was the making of a garden for the children to play in, where the first trees have been planted in the 20 years of Divis's history. It was surrounded by very sturdy iron railings. It was explained that there were problems of joyriders turning cars round in the area.

We were also taken to a Youth Club housed in the old boiler house. It had a snooker table and hairdressing facilities for the teenagers. There were outings and camps arranged for them during the year. Our guide told us that Divis flats was a no go area for the RUC, when there had been instances of stolen cars being left in Divis, the RUC would not come and collect them.

As a couple of the blocks have been demolished, people have begun to get rehoused close by in small terrace style houses. Already damp has appeared on the first to be built. The tenants fought not to have the entire estate built as cul-de-sacs, they believe they have managed to secure a compromise of 60% cul-de-sacs. But as our guide pointed out, people were taking a pride in the houses and individual features were taking shape on the uniform terraces.

En route out of Divis flats we walked past the cathedral and past some smaller blocks - mainly inhabited by the elderly.

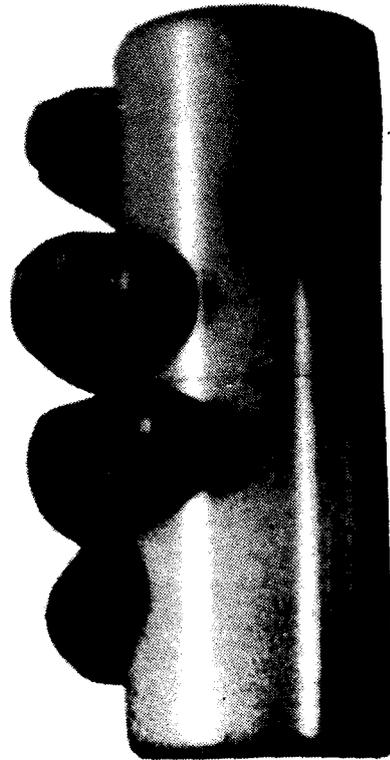
On the wall was a sign saying "These dwellings are cockroach infested". Built with asbestos the council have refused demolition and rehousing on the basis that these homes were adequate.

Our guide had been active on the estate for 20 years and she told us that as a child she used to play with protestant children in the park across the Shankill Road. Since the fostering of sectarianism resulting in a wall barricading the Falls Road area and the Shankill, she would no longer go to these areas. She said she recognises people she grew up with but doesn't know whether to say hello or not.

What impressed me was that although people were living in appalling conditions without basic amenities they were very positive and active in the way they responded and hadn't given up fighting for better conditions. All of their successes were due to their own efforts.

Plastic Bullets

Before I went on the Women and Ireland delegation I had never seen a plastic bullet. I imagined them to be about the same size as a pellet, only plastic. I was horrified by the size of the bullet which is about 4 inches long and 1½ inches in diameter, weighing over 4 ounces (the same as a cricket ball). They travel at a speed of 160-170 miles per hour. During the Plastic Bullets workshop, as we learnt about the people that had been killed and injured by these bullets I felt angered, sickened, confused, moved to tears, and yet at the same time amazed and inspired by the women who had come to talk to us in particular, and by the Irish people in general. I was trying to imagine what it must be like to have to live with the pain and injustice you must feel if your child has been killed, as 12 have. Children who like Stephen Geddis aged 10 who was merely playing in the street, or like Carol Anne Kelly aged 12 coming back from the shop with a carton of milk for her mother. The murder of children by the soldiers and the RUC seems to epitomise their total disrespect for the nationalist community. The rules governing the use of the bullets are not adhered to - ie that the bullet should not be used indiscriminately but fired at a selected target, at the lower part of the body from not less than 20 metres. Formal complaints are never taken up, no soldier or policeman has been convicted for misuse, which reinforces this disregard and disrespect.



Plastic bullet — actual size

Whilst the women who came to take the workshop were presenting these facts I felt embarrassed and guilty that I hadn't known about it before. The use of plastic bullets has gone up from 42 in 1973 to 1,231 in 1980. Three people have been killed by rubber bullets, 13 people by plastic bullets and countless injured. They are made by a firm called Standard Fireworks. I hadn't known these things.

Emma Groves who came to talk to us had been blinded by a rubber bullet. She was 51 years old, a mother of 11 children. She had been shot in the face through the open window of her home from an eight yard range, by a soldier, for putting on an Irish record. Whilst listening to her I kept wondering how on earth she managed to deal with all the feelings that must go with that ; when I began to panic and realise that one day I may have to deal with this myself; that these bullets could be introduced to our streets soon, unless we do something to stop the use of plastic bullets NOW.

"Let Us Bury Our Dead In Peace"

While the delegation was in Belfast, the funerals of 2 IRA volunteers, Brendan Burns and Brendan Moley took place. A small group from the delegation, of which I was one, attended the funerals.

There are 2 scenes which have left strong impressions on me. The first was at Brendan Burns' funeral. We were standing in the grave yard listening to the funeral oration. There were hundreds of people there, of all ages - it looked like the whole town of Crossmaglen had come to pay their respects. Large numbers of RUC were there too, standing right on top of the mourners so that they pushed and jostled them. I could see their thick barrelled plastic bullet guns, their long wooden truncheons. I felt as if the smallest incident - or perhaps no incident at all - would cause them to let loose with both these weapons; it was very tense, their presence very threatening. At the same time, large troop-carrying helicopters were taking off and landing in the field nearby. They'd followed us the whole time, but now the noise of their blades and engines almost drowned out the speeches. Suddenly, and for no reason I could see, dozens of soldiers jumped out of one, and began circling the crowd. They had on full riot gear- visors and shields as well as the usual guns. I was very aware that we were now totally surrounded - the RUC on one side, the Brits on the other. I remember thinking that the only way I could get away if they started shooting,

was to run across the gravestones to the church. They were clearly trying to scare people, this show of weaponry, the close pushing against the crowd in the graveyard.

My second impression is from Brendan Moley's funeral, which took place in a small village some way outside Crossmaglen. For several miles the funeral cortege went through winding country lanes, from Brendan Moley's house to the church. Once again, there was a heavy RUC presence at the front of the procession. The inevitable helicopters, low and noisy pressed down on me from above, and to right, masses of British troops swarmed in waves across the fields. On the left, more troops kept level with us, tramping across the fields, pulling down fences in their way. Their faces were smeared with brown and green dirt. It felt unreal, like a scene out of a war movie. It was an effort to remember that it was a funeral, not a full-battle situation. What were they doing these helicopters and troops? Why couldn't people be left to bury and mourn their dead in peace?

Afterwards I was told that the RUC and Brit presence was lower than it usually is at Republican funerals. This was put down to the fact that Crossmaglen is bandit country, a no-go area for the Brits. They can't travel the small country lanes for fear of mines and ambushes. All the troops had to be ferried in by helicopter, at great expense. Despite this, I'd found the Brit and RUC presence there huge and intimidating, a deliberate harassment and insult.

But these weren't the only impressions I took away from the funerals. There was also the presence of the hundreds of people who'd come to pay their respects to the dead volunteers, who had clearly had the support and respect of their local community. These people had shown courage and dignity at the funerals that day. Their strength, unity and resistance, seemed stronger than the guns and helicopters of the British army.



British army saracens leading the funeral cortege of Brendan Burns.

A Visit To Pauline Quinn, Maghaberry Prison

On the Saturday of the delegation I went on a prison visit to see Pauline Quinn, Maghaberry womens prison. The prison seemed to be in the middle of nowhere - reached by small country roads and surrounded by fields on all sides. The prison itself looked very alien and inhuman, like it had nothing to do with people; bleak windowless concrete walls, surrounded at some distance by huge fences. I was reminded of the nuclear bases here in England. We waited for the gates to open - electronically and accompanied by sirens and flashing lights, walked a short distance and then through another similar gate which let us into the compound which was the entrance to the prison. We walked across to some portacabins where we showed our passes and ID, and signed in gifts for the prisoners.

Thus began an hour and a half of sitting and waiting in various locked rooms. Waiting for all the visitors to be searched, waiting for our personal possessions to be sealed into envelopes to be collected on our departure, waiting and more waiting. I felt anxious that something would go wrong at the last minute and we wouldn't be able to see Pauline after the weeks of anticipation, I also felt impatient and frustrated at being locked in waiting rooms and at having to obey the prison wardens as they had all the power in the situation and the only person who'd lose if I questioned their authority would be myself or the prisoner. The tedium of waiting, the anxiety and the knowledge that the wardens knew full well they were in control. What did they think of us, coming from England to support the nationalist prisoners in their struggle? This was only my first visit, but there were those for whom this is a persistent routine, with many prisoners having served sentences of 16 years or longer, and many prisoners serving life sentences having no determined date for their release. There were two young girls amongst the visitors, one, I was later to learn, born just before her mother was imprisoned 3 years ago. Three years of seeing her mum for at most $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour a week. She seemed so fully aware of the situation and sure of herself and I remember thinking - there's no way that she's not going to become involved in the struggle when she grows older.

Finally, after being transported inside a

van which we couldn't see out of, and more waiting, Pauline's name was called and the two other women from the delegation and I got up and walked into the visiting room. There were tables set out, a screw seated on a raised platform overlooking the room and 2 women without visitors. I asked the woman nearest if she was Pauline, but she motioned me to a woman at the far end of the room, and we went and introduced ourselves. At first we were all nervous but Pauline made us tea and coffee and chatted easily to us. Throughout the visit I was aware of the time, aware that it was ticking away and that there were three of us to ask Pauline questions and she in her turn wanted to know of us and our work and our lives. We talked about her daily routine in the prison, the compulsory work she is obliged to do, due to her enforced status as a non-political prisoner; the one hour exercise in the yard - 6ft by 6ft; the lack of courses and training - at most once a week and even that under threat of being cut; of the male Doctor refusing to give any of the women smear tests - the reason stated that there was a backlog of tests to process; about the increase in stripsearching - 45 last month; about one woman who had had problems with her ovaries and had collapsed and was strip-searched on the way out of prison; the 4 remand prisoners kept isolated from the other prisoners and strip-searched constantly in and out of court; of the woman who had been put in single cell furnished only with a mattress and a bucket for 3 days at the whim of a screw.



Republican mural

Pauline wanted to know how many women were on the delegation, what support we had in England and whether there were solidarity groups working around Nicaragua and South Africa - she keeps in touch with the news via her radio. I told her about the national campaign against strip-searching and the picket outside Durham Prison and we talked of the need to convince people in England that there is a war going on in Ireland. She told us that the prisoners had their own organisation within the prison and would sometimes refuse to obey the prison warders.

Pauline is serving a five year sentence and is due to be released in September - "Not long now" she said. She talked of her family from Tyrone and how it was sometimes difficult for them to visit her and how they often get stopped and searched when travelling to see her. She talked of Armagh gaol and how the women had previously been able to hear and see the picket outside but they couldn't hear it last year as the outside gate to Maghaberry was far away from their cells and anyhow the wardens had turned the sirens on.

Towards the end of the visit I became aware of the time running out and began to feel even more nervous. All three of us from the delegation had been primed with questions to ask and I was anxious not to forget anything really crucial so I asked how being in prison had affected how she viewed the struggle and she said she now felt even more determined and committed to the struggle.

Eventually our time had run out and the wardens indicated that the visit was at an end by placing our pass on the table. We ignored this however and continued talking, a few minutes later one warden said "Right then Pauline" but again we continued talking until Pauline said - "Well then it looks like it's time for yous to go". I realised that it was important for her to determine when her visit was at an end, and for it to be up to her and not the warders as to when to say goodbye.

We hugged goodbye and as we walked out of the visiting room I turned to look back to see Pauline picking up her thermos flask and biscuits and I remember thinking now she has to return to the daily routine of prison and the petty harassment of the warders. We had touched on her life for half an hour, I wondered how long the impression would last - but I know that the thought of Pauline in prison with the other nationalist prisoners will stay with me for a long, long time. Walking back with the other visitors, all of us subdued and not talking as much as when we arrived, I began to feel overwhelmed and on the point of tears, but I thought of the people for whom this was a way of life, their only contact with friends, lovers and family. I sat on the bus and wrote down all I could remember of the visit.



Picket outside Maghaberry prison

Long Kesh Visit

The two things I remember most about the prison visit I made into Long Kesh is; how terrified I was on going in and how incredibly cheerful I was on coming out.

My fears on going in were that somehow I was endangering my life, that I didn't know what to expect, including the fact that I didn't know anything about the man I was going to see. To add to this my prison visit pass had the wrong day on it so there was a question mark about whether I was actually going to get a visit at all.

On coming out I felt very happy to be leaving the prison, to have met and liked the man I was visiting and most importantly of all, to have felt something of the high morale and optimism that he had passed on to me, about their situation as sentenced political prisoners.

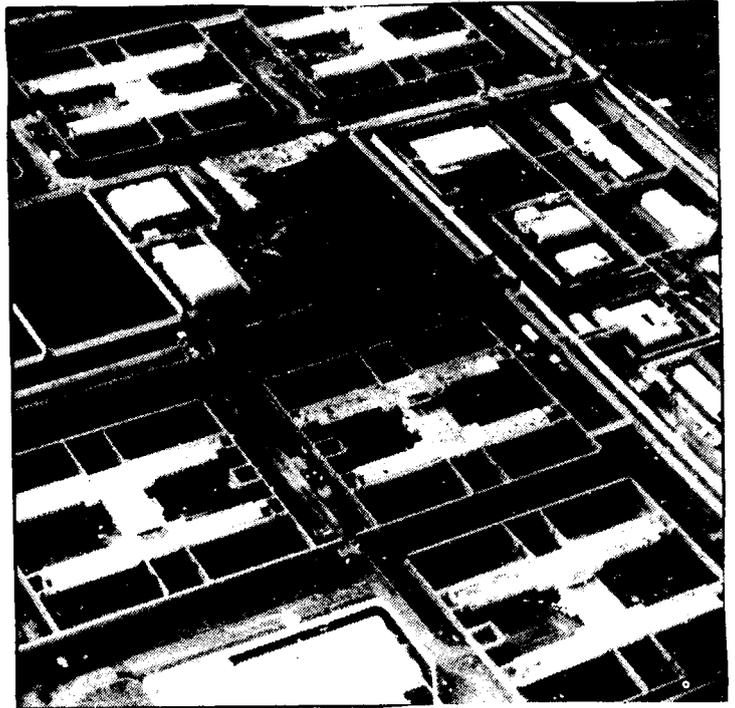
The passage into the prison was long and tedious, especially since I was the last one in our group to get in because of my pass. The screw at the reception area rang through to someone in higher authority who told him that he could make the decision. It was strange but I was aware of him holding onto that bit of information just long enough for me to know that the power lay in his hands, before granting me a visit. I went into a waiting room. Next, I was called through for a body search by two female screws in a tiny room. They searched me, put my money in a sealed envelope and left me the two cigarettes I'd brought in case the man I was visiting smoked and took everything else off me; a packet of polos and my driving licence. I was asked to take off one shoe which was banged on the floor and then I was let out of another door into a waiting room. Everything was shabby, just prefabs really. My prisoner's name and number was called out, "Francis McKilvenna, no. 60", I walked out of the room. I got onto a small bus. It was like a silver metal box inside, no windows. As the woman who'd brought us up to the prison had said, it feels like entering a gas chamber. I felt very powerless. On to another waiting room. Finally the screw came to call us into the visits - 2 hours 40 minutes after leaving Belfast. Only 30 minutes of this being the bus journey to Long Kesh.

I walked through into the visiting area, straight ahead was the cubicle number I was given. Francis beckoned me to come and sit on his bench beside him so I had my back to the screws, who stood in a line

behind. There was a table with benches either side and a partition which was about head height when sitting down. His welcome was very warm and he told me to call him Frankie if I wanted. He joked that he should have been wearing a red carnation to identify himself. I think to myself now how he probably hasn't seen one for 15 years.

My first questions were about his sentence. He told me that he has a life sentence and that he'd been in since 1973. He beamed at me and said he didn't know when he get out, "probably not until the end of the war!"

I couldn't comprehend how it must feel to have had no freedom for that long and how the world must have changed so in the meantime.



The H Blocks of Long Kesh Prison.

"How do you cope everyday with being in jail and not knowing if you're ever going to get out?" I asked.

"I cope because I know that I'm not wasting time and that I'm part of the struggle that is going on. We're so busy in here, doing Open University courses, reading, discussing and generally educating ourselves, so we don't feel like we're wasting time. We're in contact with what's going on outside."

As I continued to talk to him I began to think that he probably knew more about other struggles around the world than I did and about what is happening in Britain.

I ask what conditions are like. He says that they've been steadily improving since the escape of '83 when all their privileges were taken away from them. He told me with glee that they were about to get a record player - he said, "You see that's a really big thing for us".

I'd heard that the largest issue at the moment was the review system which the Prisoner of War campaign is organising around now. Up until now the Republican Prisoners have been refusing to join it as it is just used as a political weapon, as part of the corrupt system that put them in there in the first place. For a prisoner to participate in the review system there are many requirements. S/he must renounce all political beliefs, accept their guilt and show remorse and become totally subservient to the prison regime. For the moment, they are campaigning round issues such as being given a date of release at the time of imprisonment, which at the moment doesn't exist.

Frankie told me that lifers aren't released unless it has some political advantage for the British. This is backed up by the fact that two or three prisoners may be released a year to create an air of credence for the review board system.

We discussed the British army soldier who'd been released after 2 years 2 months because he went through the review board system. He'd been given a life sentence for murdering someone. He's serving in Germany now.

Even if this is exceptional, it's obvious that these lifers are political hostages when normally a non-political prisoner serving a life sentence in jail in Britain can hope to be released after approximately 8 years.

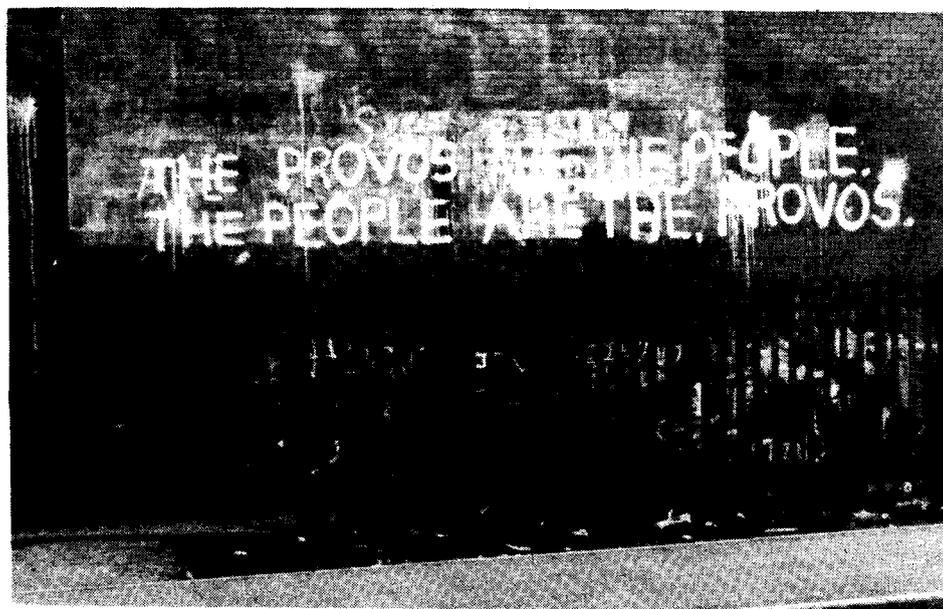
Suddenly he asked me if I'd read Lyn, which is an autobiographical book about a woman who's spent most of her life as a prostitute in Dublin. He'd obviously been completely knocked out by it. He was so angry at the way men treated women and that even when it looked as if her pimp was doing something for her, he always had an ulterior motive. He kept on saying how he was sure I must know all this but that he'd been really shocked by it.

He told me that Feminism was probably the most discussed topic in the prison, even to the point where, when new prisoners come in they seem really macho! "After a while though," he said, "they begin to understand what it's all about!"

The half hour went quickly and the screw was soon putting my prison pass down on the table, which was the indication that the visit was over. Frankie shrugged it off and carried on talking. He wanted to know more about me and we said we'd write to each other. As I left, we kissed and I felt incredibly warm towards this man I'd only met for half an hour. I had so many more questions to ask.

He hadn't stopped being positive and cheerful during the whole visit and I could not but help take some of this away with me.

On leaving, he pressed a plastic bag into my hand, containing a tin of fanta and a twix, which he refused to take back when I protested. I could not refuse this gesture of gratitude for my support - but for my part, I knew that I had taken away a lot more than these presents; I'd taken away some idea of the human will to survive and to fight for what you believe in.



Cultural Violence and Cultural Resistance



Violence is being done to the people of the nationalist communities on a massive scale. And the people there bear the marks of this violence, whether it be the direct violence of military occupation, or the hidden violence of discrimination in employment and housing, unemployment, poverty, media distortion and political vetting. Resistance to this violence is enormously strong: one woman said, "They could take all our sons tomorrow, all the young men between 16 and 25 years of age, and put them up against a wall and shoot them, and it wouldn't make a blind bit of difference. Because in five years time there'd be the young lads grown and ready to take their place." But the cost of this resistance is agonising.

The women's bodies are wounded by plastic bullets, wounds which are often left untreated because women run the risk of being arrested at the hospitals after an outbreak of 'disorder', and with a family of children to look after, you cannot run the risk of laying yourself open to arrest. The children's bodies bear the marks of poor diet and stress rashes, sores on their faces, painfully thin arms and legs, deafness and lack of co-ordination. The people are living in a sustained and continuing situation of stress, that is so intense it's taken me over a week to recover from my four-day taste of it. Children being lifted, the presence of a massive battery of surveillance equipment, with cameras trained on many streets of Belfast and Derry, the presence of 30,000 members of the British forces, armed with sophisticated weaponry and armoured cars - how do you cope with this? In order to carry on the kind of resistance which has been going on for the last 20 years, you'd have to become hard on the outside and empty on the inside - unless you were at the same time setting up positive alternatives to the oppressive forces which are constitutionally ruling your lives.

It was these positive alternatives which I found most remarkable. They have

grown out of a development of consciousness which goes like this: On the television and in other media, in legislation, in the presence of British troops on your streets, what are you seeing? You are seeing that what is being promoted is the 'British' way of doing things. Everything that is most modern, most clever, most forward-looking, most sensible, is seen as British. Everything that is to do with Irish ways is denigrated and not represented at all in the media: these things are seen as backward and divisive, harking back to something that doesn't exist. So for instance, war films are seen on television, violent though they may be, but proper debate with the Sinn Fein leadership is not allowed, since they are the uncontrollable 'men of violence'. So for instance, Gaelic football is not permitted in prisons, only soccer. So, for instance, all the money and resources going into the 6 Counties from central government is going only to those institutions which promote the British way of doing things. A diluted version of this state of affairs has prevailed so successfully in Britain that, as an Irish person growing up in Britain I have been presented with a view of my culture as being one long wasteland of non-achievement, and my people as being so stupid, violent and uncontrollable that they need the British to sort them out.

Until the great famine of the 1840's, Irish was the spoken language of the majority of the Irish people. It's only in the last 150 years that it has become a



minority language, due to legislation and punishment. If you take away a people's language, you are taking away from them their culture, the whole rich memory of their way of looking at the world and relating to it. You are doing violence to a people's minds, taking away their history, destroying their identity and lowering their spirit. In return, you are giving them their history re-written in your terms, in the language of those who have colonised them.

Resistance to this form of colonisation is rising up today among the young in the nationalist communities. Steye Bikó has said, "The greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed". A way of freeing your mind from the chains of this colonialism is to make a conscious effort to discover the past which has been taken away from you and to recover the best of its values. To rid your mind and the institutions of your daily life from the influences of an alien



culture, because, make no mistake, in Ireland British state intervention is the imposition of an alien culture on people's lives.

So, Irish prisoners in British jails are learning Irish and using it to sustain their morale. Street signs in nationalist communities are being written in Irish - not just being translated from one language into another, but being renamed, so that names honouring British statesmen - eg Cavendish Street, Canning Street et al - are being given new names rooted in Irish culture. And if the media portray only one message, then wall murals tell a different story. In the past four years the numbers of people learning Irish language and history at Conway Mill education centre have grown from 25 to 350. There are now 5 Irish-language nursery schools in Belfast, as well as an all-Irish primary school. In 1977 there were 22 all-Irish nursery schools in the whole of Ireland, now there are 150.

Irish history is being reclaimed. The civilisation of Ireland before the Anglo-Norman invasion is being studied. Going back to these old times is not a kind of unreal, romantic nationalism, but a positive reclaiming of socialist ideas which were always there in Irish culture. And some lingering remnants of this culture have not been totally destroyed, but linger on in the passionate Irish belief in hospitality to strangers, in reverence for the dead, and in enormous respect for learning and spiritual values, and the importance of debate and conversation. Implicit within this is an attempt to include women on the agenda in ways which go beyond the merely tokenistic, which hark back to the proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916 which is addressed to 'Irishmen and Irishwomen', and which 'guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens, cherishing all the children of the nation equally and oblivious of the divisions carefully fostered by an alien government'. Now is to be heard the challenge 'Ni saoirse go saoirse na mban' - there can be no freedom unless women are free.



Houses in New Lodge - with windows protected against attacks

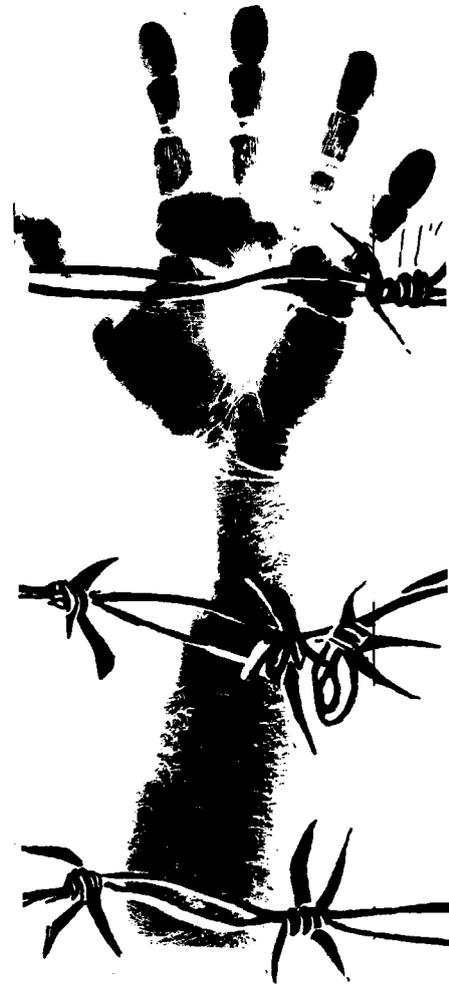


That this reclamation of the old values is seen as a threat by the British state today can be seen by the withdrawal of funds by the British government, on 5th August 1987, first of all from the creche at Conway Mill education centre, then from the gaelic-speaking schools, and from the tenants groups on three housing estates. It seems that organising a playgroup and planting flowers and trees in the pathetic patch of dirt outside it, in the shadow of cameras and saracens, is a subversive act. People organising themselves pose more of a threat than political parties do.

This kind of political vetting, of hidden violence, won't ever succeed within the 6 counties, in the same way that the overt military violence won't succeed. Solidarity is unbelievably strong within the nationalist communities. But events over the past weeks show how it might succeed in isolating these communities from the rest of the world: this is one implication of the latest actions of ITN and the BBC in handing over untransmitted footage to the RUC. And it has also succeeded here in Britain to such an extent that even the mildest attempt in social chit-chat to place events like the Gibraltar shootings into a political and historical context, is to expose yourself to the accusation of supporting 'terrorism'. While of course the violence done to us in our daily lives, the invisible violence of legislation and repression, is not terrorism.

Reasonable discussion on Ireland, informed debate, is outlawed, quite literally, by legislation, by censorship and by self censorship. And meanwhile, thousands of our sisters and brothers in Ireland suffer, and hundreds of them die. We must ask ourselves, in whose interest it is that this state of affairs should prevail? In whose interest is it that people should ignore completely the existence of a situation as unjust and repressive as a South Africa or a Vietnam on our very doorstep?

I'd like to know why it is that it is acceptable to support the ANC or SWAPO, but anathema to even discuss the situation in the 6 counties of the north of Ireland which are under British rule. As long as in one part of the British state oppression is being practised on such a massive scale, for such a long period of time, then the consequences of the surveillance, the secrecy, the espionage and counter-espionage will continue to spread over the rest of Britain like a malevolent, shadowy mist.



The notion of freedom in Britain is an uneasy one, as long as Ireland is not free. It is up to each and every one of us to have the courage to raise our consciousness so that Ireland is no longer a taboo subject. It is up to us to seek to place events there within the proper historical and political context, so that we too can operate our own form of cultural resistance to the forces of misinformation, censorship and oppression which are beginning to completely rule our lives.

Mairead Farrell

On the 1987 International Women's Day delegation to Belfast, many of us were inspired and impressed by the courage and commitment of a woman who spoke at the picket of Maghaberry jail. She had spent 10 years in prison herself, and recently released, was continuing to campaign against British injustice in her land. She spoke particularly passionately against the practice of strip-searching, having experienced it herself and knowing what effect this on-going sexual harassment was having on her sisters still incarcerated in the jail.



This woman was Mairead Farrell. On Sunday March 6th, 1988, she was summarily executed, along with her 2 comrades Sean Savage and Daniel McCann, by SAS troops in Gibraltar. We were shocked and outraged to hear of these deaths when we arrived back in England after the delegation.

The few days we had spent in the north of Ireland had given us some idea of why a young woman like Mariead would risk imprisonment and death to fight for the freedom of her country. We want to pay tribute here, to her strength and resolve and to protest the shoot-to-kill policy of the British government.

Brighton Women and Ireland Group

The Brighton Women and Ireland Group (BWIG) has been going since 1983. Our aim is to get people interested in what is happening in the North of Ireland and to win support for the struggle of the Irish people against British domination. We believe that there should be an end to British military presence in the six counties of Northern Ireland and we support the Republican struggle for a united socialist Ireland free from British control.

In our work we aim to raise discussion of Ireland as much as possible and make sure that people are well-informed. Our work includes:

- Organising women from Brighton to join the International Women's Day delegation to Northern Ireland in March every year. We believe that this is an important way to learn about the situation there; the roots of the conflict; the lives of women living in Belfast and Derry and how they are struggling to change their situation. The delegation is also a way of showing our support to Republican women active in the struggle. In particular we want to show our solidarity with the women political prisoners, so we attend the picket at Maghaberry jail on the Sunday of the delegation. This is also a protest against strip-searching.

- Running educational courses, usually in the early summer. These are designed to give women a basic background to what is going on in the North of Ireland. Some of the topics we cover are: the historical background to the conflict, British methods of repression, resistance to repression, women's role in the struggle and Loyalism.

- Speaking to local groups. These groups are women only and mixed and include: women's groups, political parties, trade unions, peace groups and solidarity campaigns. At these talks we try to pass on what we've learnt, encourage women to come on the delegation and talk about specific issues such as strip searching or plastic bullets. As we want as many people as possible to enter into discussion and action on Ireland we are continuously trying to expand the range of groups we talk to.

- Political action. When an event happens in the North of Ireland or over here which we believe warrants some form of direct political action. For example the recent SAS killings of three IRA members in Gibraltar for whom we staged a picket/vigil outside the local army recruiting office.

If you would like to:

- Join the group
- Get a speaker for a group you are involved in
- Make a donation or standing order

please contact BWIG

PO Box 937

Brighton BN2 3SA

Title: 4 Days in Belfast and Derry: Views of Life in the north of Ireland

Organisation: Brighton Women and Ireland Group

Date: 1988

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