

Friday, October 31 2008

Independent.ie

FILM & CINEMA

6° Dublin Hi 6°C / Lo 1°C

Search   [Advanced Search](#)

**Docs Money!**  
Make Money Online.  
\*Participation Required



**Make £300 in one hour!**

- [News](#)
  - [Business](#)
  - [Sport](#)
  - [Entertainment](#)**
  - [Health](#)
  - [Lifestyle](#)
  - [Education](#)
  - [Travel](#)
  - [Jobs](#)
  - [Property](#)
  - [Cars](#)
  - [Book an Ad](#)
- [More Services](#) [Film & Cinema](#) [Music](#) [Going Out](#) [Books](#) [Arts](#) [TV & Radio](#) [Crosswords](#) [Horoscopes](#) [Lotto](#) [Competitions](#) [Day and Night](#)

You are here: [Home](#) > [Entertainment](#) > [Film & Cinema](#)

## The moral Maze of filming The Troubles

SHARE PRINT EMAIL TEXT SIZE

Saturday October 18 2008

The North is back in business, cinematically speaking, over the next few months, as a number of new films address its recent violent history. Anton, which opened last week, is an Irish thriller apparently based on a true story about a [Cavan](#) man who gets involved in the IRA; but the dark years of the 1970s and 80s are more directly tackled by two forthcoming and altogether more significant films.

[Kari Skogland's](#) Fifty Dead Men Walking, which will open later in the year, is a dark and violent drama based on the life of IRA mole [Martin McGartland](#); and [Steve McQueen's](#) Hunger, which opens here on October 31, deals with the still more sensitive theme of the 1981 hunger strikes. And, in different ways, both films have shown that when it comes to the North, old wounds are never far from the surface.

When Fifty Dead Men Walking was shown at the [Toronto Film Festival](#) in September, one of the film's young stars, the Irish-American actress [Rose McGowan](#), commented casually that if she'd grown up in [Belfast](#), "I would have 100pc been in the IRA". The guano promptly hit the fan.

In addition, Martin McGartland piped up from a secret location (he's still in hiding) to object to his portrayal in the film. Though a spokesman for production company Future Films claimed that McGartland hadn't yet seen the film and was consequently not best placed to assess its merits, the former mole was angered by the way the film portrayed him as a disgruntled IRA member who breaks ranks and starts working for an [RUC](#) special agent for money.

According to McGartland, that version of events was "wholly untrue". He "went into the IRA to infiltrate them. Prior to being recruited as a special branch agent, I wasn't in the IRA, I wanted nothing to do with them -- in truth, I hated them". He certainly must by now. After becoming a high-level informer, McGartland survived several IRA assassination attempts, apparently foiling one by leaping from an upstairs window, and being attacked again as recently as 1999 when his location in the northeast of [England](#) was discovered.

And while he was reportedly delighted about the idea of his life (which he'd expounded in a 1997 memoir) being turned into a film, he seems conflicted about the result.

All of that, though, could be a storm in a teacup compared to the potential furore Steve McQueen's film may cause. In Hunger, McQueen (a Turner Prize-winning artist) focuses unflinchingly on the conditions inside the Maze Prison in the early 1980s, and on the final days of [Bobby Sands](#). When the film was screened as part of the Un Certain Regard section at the [Cannes Film Festival](#) this year, it prompted both wild applause and angry walkouts (it subsequently won the prestigious [Camera d'Or](#) award for first-time filmmakers). And if it caused such dissent in [France](#), you can imagine what it might do here.

It has already been accused of portraying Sands as a sort of secular saint, and seems certain to

Articles Topics

Articles

- [Director apologises for actress's IRA comments](#)
- [Film cements 'enduring legacy' of Sands, says hunger striker](#)
- [I would have joined IRA, says star](#)
- [Bobby Sands film defended for its 'insight' into suicide bombers](#)
- ['It looked suspiciously like a controlled explosion'](#)
- [Pakistan denies hiding al-Qa'ida](#)

Topics

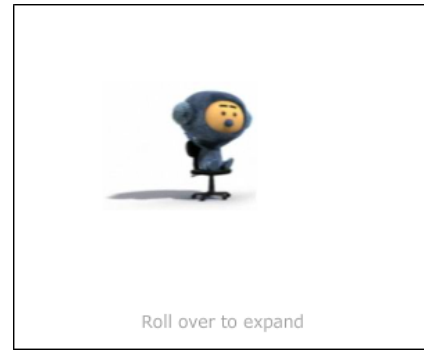
- [Martin McGartland](#)
- [Steve McQueen](#)
- [Bobby Sands](#)
- [War and Conflict](#)
- [Belfast](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Movies](#)

Also in Film & Cinema

- [RTE stars find solace at Bond movie premiere](#)
- [Who's the hero? Bond vs Bourne](#)
- [The name's Bond, Seamus Bond](#)
- [Reindeer tale sleighs audiences](#)
- [Warlords](#)

[Film & Cinema Home](#)

Independent.ie  Web



[Click Here!](#)

CURSORMANIA



Advertiser Links

[Herald.ie](#)  
If its happening in Dublin it's on Herald.ie  
[www.herald.ie](#)

divide opinion sharply both north and south of the border. Sands was only 27 when he died on May 5, 1981, after two months on hunger strike. As the IRA's commanding officer in the Maze, it was he who decided to lead the 1981 hunger strike in protest at the British government's refusal to grant Republican prisoners political status. Any government involving [Margaret Thatcher](#) was unlikely to lose a staring contest, and Sands and nine other prisoners had died before the strike was eventually called off.

Its effect on Northern life and politics was seismic. Before his death, Sands had been elected MP for west Belfast, and it was this victory as much as anything else that set Sinn Finn on the road to constitutional politics.

But the Maze martyrs were also an effective recruiting tool for the Provos, and the violence would stretch on pointlessly for the bones of the next two decades. Like it or not, then, Sands will increasingly be seen as a significant historical figure along the lines of 1920s hunger striker [Terence McSwiney](#).

He's played in the film by [Michael Fassbender](#), a 31-year-old [Dublin](#) actor who went on a controlled diet and lost over three-and-a-half stone for the film's most crucial -- and excruciating -- scenes. But though McQueen does not flinch from portraying the ugly reality behind the lofty romanticism of a hunger strike, he does not tell the Maze story strictly from the hunger strikers' point of view.

In fact, his film opens with the dawning day of a prison officer, who eats his hearty [Ulster](#) fry and checks beneath his [Ford Granada](#) for bombs before driving to the Maze to begin a gruelling day of grimness and beatings.

The sickening violence of the situation seems almost self-propelling, and McQueen makes it abundantly clear that the guards' lives are not enhanced by the experience of dealing with prisoners 'on the blanket', who smear their cell walls with their own faeces.

Nor is Sands allowed to escape uncensured. In a crucial scene, he is accused by a priest (played by [Liam Cunningham](#)) of having a pointless love of death and being excessively vain about the idea of his place in history. Prison guards are executed in front of their families, and a young riot squad policeman weeps at the brutality he is expected to inflict on the prisoners, but none of this will be enough to prevent accusations of canonisation from certain quarters.

McQueen himself has taken a broader view, comparing the situation in the Maze to [Abu Ghraib](#) and [Guantanamo Bay](#) and claiming that he has not taken sides. "The film," he insists, "is about people in an extreme situation on either side; both prisoners and prison officers. I am interested in what happens to people in those kind of conditions." He may brace himself for the Belfast premiere. \_\_\_\_\_ 'Hunger' opens nationwide on October 31

[pwhittington@independent.ie](mailto:pwhittington@independent.ie)

SHARE PRINT EMAIL TEXT SIZE

#### Sponsored Links

##### Star Wishing's Name A Star Gifts

Name a star and add a meaningful wish. Personalized gifts for every occasion. Come see why our customers love us.  
[www.starwishing.com](http://www.starwishing.com)

##### Free video

Get free video and earn £50 free at the same time. Join free.  
[www.cashbackwow.co.uk](http://www.cashbackwow.co.uk)

##### Get Free Stuff for Taking Online Surveys

Take online surveys and get Free Stuff. PaidSurveys.com finds you online opportunities to share your opinion and earn rewards. Join for free today.  
[www.paidsurveys.com](http://www.paidsurveys.com)