

# REVISITING THE TROUBLES

## CANNES TRIUMPH FOR HUNGER, STEVE MCQUEEN'S FEATURE DEBUT

A generation ago, Northern Ireland was a very different place, driven by political discord and sectarian violence. IRA prisoners in the infamous H-Blocks of the Maze Prison fought back in a remarkable way, beginning hunger strikes in protest at not being recognised as political prisoners.

The first to die, in 1981, was Bobby Sands, nine more were to follow, but their actions changed the face of the conflict and arguably set in motion the peace agreement that prevails in Northern Ireland today. Sands' story is told in *Hunger*, the debut feature film from Turner Prize-winning British artist Steve McQueen, and recent Camera d'Or winner at Cannes.

DP Sean Bobbitt BSC had collaborated with McQueen on three art installations previously, so was well placed to observe the new challenges the artist was facing from working with actors to conforming to certain cinematic necessities.

"It was really interesting," Bobbitt says "because it goes against everything he's ever done in terms of non-linear style and the lack of formal structure. To suddenly start to work within the confines of a narrative was quite a struggle for him, I think, but what has come out of it was quite unusual, unique and very exciting.

"The way in which it's structured is unusual and I think very much in keeping with Steve's way of seeing the world. The first third of the film has elements of dialogue that have come out of the performances, but there was no dialogue written, and the centre 28 pages is a two handed dialogue scene between Bobby Sands and a priest. That's pri-

marily one shot, for about 22 minutes, of two people talking."

For his part, McQueen was keen to bring his fresh sensibility to this new medium, and convey something immediate and compelling to this story that he remembered seeing on the television news in his childhood, one which has profound modern echoes.

"*Hunger* for me has contemporary resonance. The body as site of political warfare is becoming a more familiar phenomenon. It is the final act of desperation; your own body is your last resource for protest. One uses what one has, rightly or wrongly."

In order to realise his vision the director and his team, including co-writer Enda Walsh, production designer Tom McCullagh, producer Laura Hastings-Smith and Bobbitt visited the Maze prison in Belfast to get a sense of the place.

On sets built by McCullagh, production began and a cast including Michael Fassbender as Bobby Sands, Stuart Graham as prison guard Raymond Lohan and Liam Cunningham as Father Moran set about realising the vision of their director.

"When you look at a painting by Velasquez or a Goya," says McQueen, "the composition of the image holds your gaze – their painting has an attractiveness and a questioning quality. What you're attracted to, you can also be repulsed by. People will not stay in the room if you're doing a bad job." ANWAR BRETT

■ *Hunger* was originated on 35mm Fujicolor ETERNA 500T 8573, ETERNA 250D 8563, ETERNA Vivid 160T 8543 and ETERNA 400T 8583



### THE DP VIEW

SEAN BOBBITT BSC

The long dialogue scene happened in a very organic way, and the fact that it's happened in one shot it is purely down to Steve. Originally it was a dialogue sequence with normal coverage but then the idea was conceived of doing it as one shot, because we could do it as one shot on a thousand foot roll shooting two perf. The roll is 22 minutes long and the scene itself was 22 minutes long, so it was a technical possibility, which was explored and exploited.

"From a technical point of view and also from a financial point of view it's actually quite significant because I think this is the first feature shot in the UK on two perforations.

"The difference in cost between shooting it on Super 16, which it was budgeted for originally, and 35mm 2:39 widescreen was £12,500. I think there are so many lower budget productions that will start looking at 35mm whereas in the past they wouldn't even think about it."



Photo main: Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender) in the Maze prison; above l-r: Brian Milligan (as Davey Gillen) and Liam McMahon (as Gerry Campbell) during the blanket protest; Stuart Graham (as Raymond Lohan) on lunch break; Fassbender and Liam Cunningham (as father Dominic Moran); director Steve McQueen; DP Sean Bobbitt on the set of *Hunger*

