

CAL: Timeless in its relevance

By PAT FAGAN

IN THE TIME SINCE THE "Troubles" have come to Northern Ireland, the people there have been at war. They've been fighting forces from outside Ireland, and they have fought each other.

The streets of Londonderry and Belfast have been the settings of bloody violence for many years. The Protestants and Roman Catholics live far enough apart to assert their individuality, yet close enough to be in constant conflict.

The problem goes back as far as the early 1600's, when the British Monarchy sought to prevent Catholic uprisings in Ulster (Northern Ireland) by handing over their land to English and Scottish Protestants. In the past 100 years, the rule of all Ireland moved towards autonomy from Great Britain, but Ireland was divided into the Republic of Ireland (also known as the Irish Free State) and Northern Ireland in 1920. This move gave independence to the former, but kept the latter under British control.

Catholic unrest was expressed in riots during 1969, which brought British troops into Ulster to maintain order. Since then, there has been anything but order. The violence has continued and expanded; Northern Ireland now stands as one of the world's foremost examples of sectarian conflict and political discord.

At the forefront of the violence is the largely Catholic Irish Republican Army, which is fighting to force the British out of Ulster. News of the IRA's terrorist campaign is commonplace today, whether in Belfast itself, or in the aisles of Harrod's department store in London.

With all of the attention devoted to the IRA, the real issues of the conflict are often buried in the body counts and the outrage over attacks on figures such as Lord Moutbatten and Margaret Thatcher in recent times. Because of this, the full scope of the Protestant/Catholic conflict is often overlooked.

Lately, Northern Ireland has gained media attention, but not for the usual reason. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Ireland's Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald recently signed an accord aimed at ending what *Time* called "the deadly cycle of attack and revenge" between the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority. In short, their agreement permits the initial transfer of power from England to the legislature in Northern Ireland. Thus the IRA may gradually be eliminated, while narrowing the sectarian gap.

This is the boldest step the British have taken in a long time, and opposition has come quickly from both sides. The first to protest was the highly vocal and militant Protestant leader, Rev. Ian Paisley. He, with a dozen other Democratic Unionist party members, recently resigned from the British House of Commons in

protest of the accord. Paisley has warned that unless a referendum is held in Ulster on the issue, "the politicians will be swept aside and other people not interested in politics will take over." He urged Thatcher to "let the ballot speak before the bomb and bullet speak."

The IRA, meanwhile, opposes the accord, seeing it as a means to legitimize the British presence in Ireland and feeling the reforms do not go far enough.

To confirm Rev. Paisley's predictions, unrest has begun escalating in the past few weeks. During the first meeting of the British-Irish ministerial body set up by the accord at Stormont Castle near Belfast, 38 policemen were injured while protecting the complex from a group of Protestants armed with bricks and bottles. The IRA has been mounting an increasing number of mortar

patches. His guilt, however, is swamped by his growing obsession with her; through circumstance, he ends up working as a farm hand at her country home.

In the midst of this, Cal and his father are being hounded out of their home in a housing block that's becoming heavily dominated by Protestants. The pair defy the "Orangemen" but have no alternative to leaving when they are literally 'burned out' of their house. Cal succumbs to the pressure of a local schoolteacher, who is also an IRA organizer. Haunted both by the murder he took part in and the committing of his father to an insane asylum, Cal participates in another "job", but finally decides he wants out. Despite his inner confusion, Cal takes refuge at the widow's farm. A relationship develops between them, but in the end Cal is doomed by it.

One of the features of this film

hyperactivity. His wide range of behavior shows the complex situation he finds himself in. He is being driven by many different influences, each bringing out a different emotion. The strain becomes too much for Cal, but he chooses not to fight the outside world and surrenders.

The cast has the ability to show anguish quite vividly without having to resort to frantic displays of emotion. They live with the conditions imposed on them the best they can. Still, they collect scars, both internally and externally. In the end, the looks on their faces show the subtle insanity born of life and death in Belfast.

Another powerful part of *Cal* is the music in the background, written by Mark Knopfler of Dire Straits. The light sounds of tin whistle intertwined with gentle acoustic guitar in haunting,

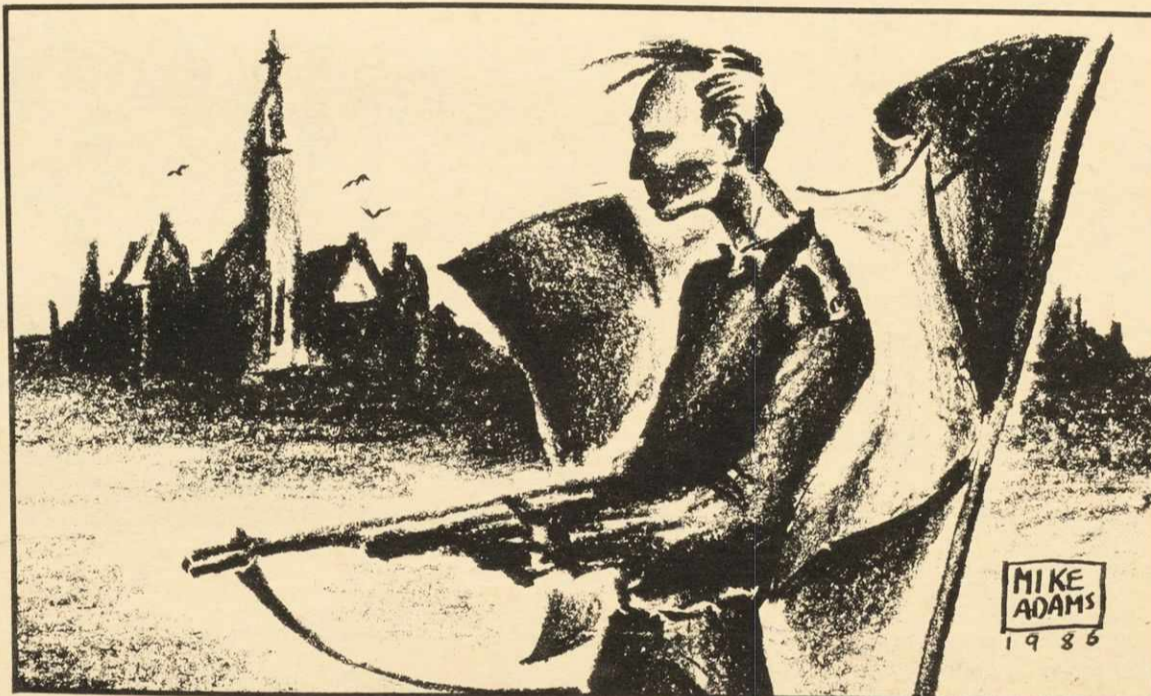
way home. The beat of their drums resounds like gunfire as the parade passes the McCloskey home, in the form of psychological warfare.

Along with this imagery, there is the obligatory love scene. When Cal and Marcella eventually meet in bed, she finds the pleasure she believed had permanently eluded her; Cal finds a nightmare. While making love, Cal flashes back to the scene in the same house when Marcella's husband was murdered. Cal goes through a mental rollercoaster, seeing flames and bullets tearing through flesh. When he recalls the gunshots, he is teetering on the brink of madness. It's a scene of intense passion, shot in a room that surrounds them with pictures of the dead man; the images speed through Cal's consciousness like a runaway train. It is an emotional tour-de-force not seen in other films.

By the end of *Cal*, these visuals are enough to make your head spin. The idea you are left with, though, is that the movie was fair in regards to the subject matter. It's difficult to achieve objectivity in such a two-sided affair. Although depicting the life of a Catholic Irishman, *Cal* succeeds by showing the interaction of the two sides, as well as the involvement of the British. Basically, it gives the positions of the two groups equally, while making specific observations about the people involved.

The general drift of the film showed Catholics adhering strongly to their religion; for example, it portrays the importance of the Catholic mass in Cal's life. Likewise, the scene in which Cal is beaten up by three Protestant youths dressed in the British flag, shows the Protestant identification with their nationalism — their ties to England. The British troops appear dehumanized; this was intended to show the role of oppression they represent to many of the Irish, who must tolerate security checkpoints and other military processes. The presence of the troops is often shown more by armored personnel carriers and automatic weapons than by the men themselves.

The impact of *Cal* is a very effective look at the human devastation in Northern Ireland. For a fictional account, it was realistic and well-thought-out, and almost appeared to be documentary in the way it revealed the contrasts of beauty and brutality found in Ulster. The pace at which calm and fury interchange is unsettling; it leaves you somewhat shell-shocked afterwards. And for all of the causes which people die for in Northern Ireland, the movie says something of the extreme groups, such as the Irish Republican Army in its Provisional branch, and equally militant Protestant groups. This is not a Hollywood-style film, and there are no "good guys and bad guys". As a farmhand says to Cal as they drive through Belfast, "There are bad bastards on both sides."



attacks on Ulster police stations while threatening those rebuilding already-damaged buildings.

In the first few minutes of 1986, the IRA detonated a remote-control bomb that killed two policemen in Armagh. Taking credit for the blast, the IRA announced, "The timing of the attack was chosen to show that throughout 1986 we plan to strike with increasing effectiveness."

At a time when the situation in Ulster is reaching such a critical point, it is ironic that the film *Cal* appeared recently at the Rebecca Cohn. *Cal* deals with life in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland and the scene of much of its conflict.

The movie centers on Cal McCloskey, an Irish Catholic in his early twenties living in Belfast. In the film's opening scenes, Cal is a getaway driver for an IRA operative who kills an off-duty officer of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the local police, in his own home.

About a year later, Cal finds himself attracted to the new clerk at the local library. However, he is shocked when he learns she is the widow of the policeman he and his friend previously dis-

is that the acting is believable and fiery. Helen Mirren, in the role of the widow, Marcella, moves with a quiet determination, masking the pain and longing she feels. The adjustments she has had to make in her way of life are reflected in her time-worn face. Yet an inner glow still manages to eclipse her weariness, especially when she is attracted to Cal.

Donal McCann, a veteran Irish actor, portrays Shamie, Cal's father. In the course of events, he, too, shows a weariness that competes with his fears and angers. With his house burned to the ground, he undergoes a frightening psychological transformation. With a stony, expressionless face, he sits and nervously tears chunks out of the arms of his easy chair. After years of patience, the man has reached his breaking point.

The most incredible performance, however, is given by John Lynch in the title role. He gives Cal a face so expressive that you can read his very soul by it. Lynch's harsh, pale features show all the torment, sadness and fear that is gnawing away at him. When he's around Marcella, his nervous behavior verges on

moody tones of the countryside surge to ragged electric chords telling of danger in the dark streets of Belfast at night. Knopfler's emotive music captures the moments of tranquil solitude and escape in Cal's life, before releasing the drama and violence that engulf him.

For all its charms, the movie's positive effect comes from its cinematic imagery. For instance, a fundamentalist preacher makes several appearances throughout the movie. His appearance in a quiet valley beyond the city is unsettling; he is shown nailing a sign on a dead tree. Scrawled in red script, it reads: "The Wages Of Sin Is Death". He is later seen on a Belfast street-corner preaching redemption in an eerie monotone, as if to suggest the presence of Death itself.

The scenery of Belfast itself is used to maximum potential. As the armored vehicles of the British prowl the streets, you see the walls adorned in the messages of both sides, such as "Brits Out". The sights and sounds of an Orangemen's Day parade provide a tense atmosphere in a neighborhood buried in a sea of Union Jacks, which confronts Cal on his