



The Ballymurphy Precedent

Director: Callum Macrae
An Awen Media Production of an
Outsider Movie Company film
In association with: Channel 4
Presented by: Ffilm Cymru Wales, Dartmouth Films
Executive Producers: Christopher Hird,
Dorothy Byrne, Adam Partridge
Producer: Gwion Owain
Co-producer: Mark Williams
Head of Production: Selina Kay
Director of Photography: Huw Walters
Editor: Charlie Hawryliw
Music Composer: Wayne Roberts
UK 2018
108 mins
Digital

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HIDDEN TRUTHS: JOHN PILGER AND THE POWER OF DOCUMENTARY

The Ballymurphy Precedent

The screening on Tuesday 26 November will be introduced by director Callum Macrae

'A landmark film. The sheer humanity makes the crimes committed and the justice denied unforgettable.' – John Pilger

Director's notes

At the heart of my film is a terrible story. In a housing estate in west Belfast in 1971, the British army shot dead ten unarmed Catholics – including a priest and a mother of eight. An eleventh victim died of a heart attack after a confrontation with an army patrol. These innocent people all died as a result of an operation carried out by members of Britain's elite Parachute regiment – the same regiment which five months later was to shoot dead another 13 innocent people on Bloody Sunday.

I first began looking into this story in 2015. The more I spoke to people who were there at the time, including the survivors and the relatives, many of whom were then still children, the clearer it became that there was even more to this story than the tragedy of these appalling killings.

I came to realise that what happened over those three days is actually central to understanding what happened over the next 30 years in Northern Ireland. So, as well as being a forensic investigation of those killings, my film is about the catastrophic military and political strategy which led to them – and the decades of bloody violence which followed.

But I didn't want this to be either a political polemic or simply an investigation of the facts. This is a very human story. It is about the experiences of the ordinary Catholic people (and in particular the women) of Ballymurphy as they lived through the early, traumatic, period of what was to become a 30-year war. It is the story of the bereaved families' courage and their determination to get to the truth.

But this story also calls into question the conventional history of the Troubles and demands a re-examination of Britain's role in the creation of 30 years of war in Northern Ireland. The truth about the killings in Ballymurphy leaves British claims that Bloody Sunday was an isolated incident looking completely implausible. It also, in my view, renders unsustainable the conclusion of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry that the British Government and Ministry of Defence could not be held responsible for those deaths in Derry, five months later.

As Richard Rudkin, one of the British soldiers who appears in the film, says: 'If steps had been taken to look at what happened in Ballymurphy, admit what had gone wrong, Bloody Sunday would never have occurred, and if Bloody Sunday would never have occurred, I would suggest many more deaths after that would never have occurred.'

But there was another thing that was important in the way we approached making this film. I didn't want the cinema audience to meet the people in the film as 'victims'. They are not in any sense victims, they are brave, dignified and determined people.

So, when we trace the events which led to the massacre, we see much of it – including the anti-Catholic pogroms; the creation of thousands of refugees, many of whom had been burnt out of their homes; the arrival of the British

HIDDEN TRUTHS: JOHN PILGER AND THE POWER OF DOCUMENTARY

I Am Not Your Negro

Sat 26 Oct 20:35; Sat 9 Nov 15:30;

Thu 21 Nov 18:30; Sat 30 Nov 18:15

Seniors' Free Talk: The Quiet Mutiny + intro and Q&A with author Anthony Hayward

Mon 28 Oct 11:45

Seniors' Free Matinee: The Last Day + intro with author Anthony Hayward

Mon 28 Oct 14:00

The Pilger Effect

Mon 28 Oct 18:15

The War You Don't See

Mon 28 Oct 20:35; Sat 16 Nov 18:10

Death of a Nation: The Timor Conspiracy + Palestine Is Still the Issue

Sat 2 Nov 15:00

The Golden Dream La Jaula De Oro

Tue 5 Nov 20:45; Thu 14 Nov 18:10;

Sun 24 Nov 15:30

Lousy Little Sixpence + Utopia

Sun 10 Nov 14:50

Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia +

Breaking the Silence: Truth and Lies in the War on Terror

Mon 18 Nov 18:10

Burp! Pepsi v Coke in the Ice Cold War

+ Flying the Flag: Arming the World

Sat 23 Nov 17:45

The Coming War on China

Sat 23 Nov 20:10; Fri 29 Nov 18:15

The Ballymurphy Precedent

Tue 26 Nov 18:10 (+ intro by director

Callum Macrae); Sat 30 Nov 12:20

The documentaries in this season contain distressing scenes of both violence and racism related to the events they cover

With thanks to

John Pilger, Jane Hill, Sam Pilger, Christopher Hird, Matt Hird, David Boardman, Marcus Prince

Programme texts compiled by John Pilger, Jane Hill, Sam Pilger, Christopher Hird, Matt Hird, David Boardman, Maggi Hurt and David Somerset

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army (at first welcomed, then feared and resented) – through the eyes of people who were then children.

Some of these children were later to lose a mother, a brother or a father, but their story starts with their memories of living through – and growing up – at the very start of the Troubles.

The most difficult challenge of the film was describing the awful reality of the killings themselves. Unlike on Bloody Sunday, five months later, there were no cameras in Ballymurphy to record the shootings. Indeed, that is partly why to this day so few people even know of the massacre – and also why the army's official version of events, that the victims were armed, hardcore IRA members, has still never been officially challenged.

So, we had to create our own images to show what happened. We had to develop a way of showing this massacre in a way that did not sanitise it, that really conveyed the appalling, senseless violence of these deaths, but remained at the same time respectful, and devoid of gratuitous imagery.

Equally important was the need to show what happened and where it happened, in a forensically accurate way. To do this, we developed a new and innovative technique using a combination of drone imagery, live action and a CGI recreation of the locality of the killings, based on maps, plans and photographs of the area from the time.

Did we succeed? I hope so.

The critics we worried about most were the first people to see a preview version of the film: the 120 family members and friends of the victims who gathered for a private screening in the church at the heart of Ballymurphy, around which the killings occurred.

There is no doubt it was a very difficult film for the families to watch. There were many tears, but some laughter too. This was a portrait of a war in a small town and there were moments of humour even in those dark times.

As the film came to an end, there was a pause and then everyone rose to give the film a standing ovation. It was a very moving event – but I hope it was a significant one. The families and survivors are engaged in a search for truth and justice which is painful, but vitally important. A search which could help remove a significant block on the road to truth and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. I hope the film will help in that search.

As Breige Voyle, whose mother Joan was shot dead on the first day of the killings, says in the film: 'There is only one way that you can draw a line under the past. It is to tell the truth.'

Production notes courtesy of Dartmouth Films

Callum Macrae is a filmmaker and writer. An Emmy, BAFTA and Grierson nominee, he has won many awards in the UK and Peabody and Columbia Dupont Awards in the US. He headed the Channel Four team nominated in 2013 for a Nobel Peace Prize for their work on Sri Lanka which culminated in his feature documentary, *No Fire Zone, the Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*. He grew up in Nigeria and Scotland and trained as a painter at Edinburgh College of Art before becoming a dustman for two years, a teacher, a satirical cartoonist, Scottish Correspondent of *The Observer*, a television presenter and a few other things that now escape his mind.