

Gerry McConville (H5) Director of The Falls Council

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In 1969, Mr. Gerry McConville was just nine years of age when the conflict in the North of Ireland Ireland broke out (again). As a young lad in Belfast he soon learned to endure the hardships of The Troubles. He soon became politically active just two years later at the tender age of 11! In 1975, at the age of 15, he was first incarcerated with a close friend named Benny Lynch. They were arrested, charged and put into a juvenile detention centre for their actions in support of Irish freedom.

Gerry and Benny were released after a few months, but were again arrested at age 16 after an Irish Republican Army ambush on the British Army in which a British soldier was seriously wounded. He was detained in Crumlin Road Gaol after 3 days of intense interrogation. At his trial in March 1977, the British judge sitting in a Diplock Court stated that although only 17 years old, Gerry was a dedicated member of the Irish Republican Army and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment. Diplock courts were criminal courts in the North of Ireland for non-jury trial of specified serious crimes. They were introduced by the Northern Ireland Act 1973, used for political cases during the Troubles, and abolished by the Justice and Security Act 2007.

After "trial", Gerry was immediately moved to the H Blocks (Benny also) and ordered to wear a prison uniform and do prison work. He and Benny refused to do so, demanding to be recognized as political prisoners and not common felons. They soon joined the blanket protest. At that time they were the youngest political prisoners on the protest.

Gerry stayed on the protest until it finally ended in 1982 and he was released from prison in 1984. Again, he rejoined the struggle for Irish freedom. He endured oppression at the hands of a hostile occupier for many years. One could say Gerry has worked much of his life in an effort to procure Irish unity.

Gerry's struggle wasn't contained in Ireland. In 1993, he made a trip to North America. He was arrested and detained for a short period in an Oakland, CA prison, again with his dear friend Benny.

Gerry now works as a Director of the Falls Community Council, a community development organization in Belfast which works to tackle poverty, human rights and increased social inclusion in areas most affected by the conflict. Gerry has had several attempts on his life by state sponsored Loyalists paramilitaries. In spite of this he has developed several conflict resolution initiatives which bring ex combatants to the table including Loyalist paramilitaries and British soldiers who have served in the North of Ireland. He has remained steadfastly politically active from the time he was 11 years of age and is committed to the peace and political process.

He is married with 6 children and 2 grandchildren. Gerry's entire family are Irish speakers.

For Peggy to read

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