

Is There a Role for the Social Activist in the 21st Century

An examination of Social Activists in Waterford City

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Submitted in Part Fulfilment of the requirements for the
MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism

Departments of Adult and Community Education and Sociology
National University of Ireland Maynooth

2013

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Acknowledgements

I would like first and foremost to thank my friends and comrades who have given freely of their time to allow me to interview them for this research. I hope I have done you justice in my endeavours.

I must also thank my family and in particular my partner Breda for their encouragement and interest in my work.

I have used a variety of additional literary resources such as newspapers, periodicals, reports, minutes, diaries, correspondence, a selection of newsletters and leaflets, any pamphlets that I could lay my hands on and photographs that are a wonderful aid to jogging the memory. The online resources are also a great aid for the researcher and living in Waterford I found the NUIM library online a great help as was the Waterford resource section of the City Library.

Finally I would like to record my thanks to the CEESA programme and Tutors one and all. In particular I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Fergal Finnegan, my supervisor for his support and dedication which has helped me to expand my vision and also to get through to the end.

Abstract

The objective of my research was to examine the role of the activist in Waterford city. In doing so I ask the question; Is there a role for the Activist in the Twenty First Century? To answer this I researched the actions of ten activists across a range of campaigns in Waterford since the late sixties. I found that there has been very little research into this aspect of activism in Ireland which was an incentive and an enticement to me as I have a background of political, trade union, community activism and I am also very much interested hearing the stories of the activists. This gave me creditability with the participants and also allowed me a great deal of trust. It is also a pilot project for me because I want to use my experience of this exercise in attempting to create a fuller study of activism in the area. Waterford is a declining industrial city with one of the highest unemployment rates in the State and this is the current background to which activists carry out their work. When I say work I mean it in the sense that they see it as their primary function even though there is no remuneration for it. I carried out my research by interview at prearranged settings in various locations and collected the data with a digital recorder and that data was the transcribed in the painstaking fashion of the mature student. The data consisted of the activist's life history or maybe it is better to say their activist history which was then reviewed and developed in my research findings. I think the study illustrates and confirms for me that there is a rich vein of worker and activist out there waiting to be recorded.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

‘I remember the night we were there... and next thing all the courtyard below began to fill up with guards....we were up in one of the bedrooms... in the tower and we blockaded the bedrooms and the police came of course came and started to smash their way in...And...we had placed the furniture...carefully enough now because I being a woodworker was very conscious of the lovely furniture we were putting there but when the police came they started to break it up with sledge hammers and hatchets...started to smash down the stuff!’ (Interview 3. 2013)

‘When the police came they called out saying they represented the duke and asked us to leave we didn’t reply but kept piling furniture behind the doors in what we think was the duke’s bedroom. They battered their way through and we retreated to the top of the Tower’ (Interview with Donal Musgrave Irish Times Monday 18th May 1970)

These two interviews are with the same individual and concern the same incident which took place in 1970, it was the occupation of Lismore castle, Waterford, seat of the Devonshire family in Ireland, and it was the culmination of a series of fish-ins on the Blackwater River where the fishing rights were the property of the Duke of Devonshire. One interview was recorded in mid May 1970 in the immediate aftermath of the incident the other one was recorded on 26th April 2013. A remove of 43 years and the man at the centre of the action is now in his seventies and is still an activist campaigning with all the energy that he had when they occupied the castle. Donal Musgrave’s report is sympathetic, historical and it contains the voice of the activist but for me there is something missing and I think it is that the voice of the activist has been tempered for the Monday morning readership of the Irish Times. The occupation is portrayed as something novel and not as part of a process to take the Republican movement into social activism and politics.

This is not a lone voice but in fact is just one among many of the activists I have come to know during my own working, trade union and political life. At a time when the Irish are decied by some harpy voices as ‘sheeple’ why are there still some who will get out and take action. Is there a gene, highly unlikely. Stephane Hessel, French resistance fighter, diplomat

and writer (1917-2013) was in his 95th year when he wrote his 2011 pamphlet '*Time for Outrage*' he intended it as a call to arms to defend the gains of the working class and to halt the march to the right in French society;

Mankind's responsibility cannot be left to some outside power or to a god. On the contrary, people must commit themselves in terms of their personal, individual human responsibility...History is made by successive shocks, of confronting and overcoming successive challenges. Societies progress, and in the end, having attained complete liberty, may achieve a democratic state in some ideal form (pp 24-25).

Expressing his outrage at what he saw as the rolling back of gains made in the wealth gap between rich and poor and the decline of human rights that were won after the horrors of the Second World War. He called on the young people of France to take off their blinkers and to 'Look around you, and you will find things that vindicate your outrage- the treatment of immigrants, illegal aliens and Roma people. You will see concrete situations to provoke you to act as a real citizen. Seek and ye shall find' (pp.26-29). He was using literature in the time worn fashion of Tom Paine, in pamphlet form, to try and influence and urge the youth of France to action. In France as in Ireland not all people are willing to take up the challenge. But fortunately, throughout history there have been those who have chosen this path to try and make a difference, however, they are not and will not be mentioned in history as anything other than a passing backdrop in the lives of 'greater' men and it was the lives of some of those 'greater men' who were early influences in introducing me to the concept of resistance.

During the sixties and seventies in national school I had what, I suppose, was a common

enough form of socialisation for many working class youth. Growing up in those early years of the sixties as we approached the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising meant that we were exposed to a diet of the triumph of those heroes who were willing to lay down their lives for their country. The 1965 state funeral of Roger Casement as his body was returned to Ireland and re-interred in Glasnevin was an injustice undone. There was no more noble sacrifice we were told and we believed it. In the national schools we drilled with hurleys in the playground and in the classroom sang the songs of revolution, of sacrifice and of the young women who stayed behind and pined for their young men lost in the Dublin battle. RTE, or Telefis Eireann as it was at the time, produced numerous programmes about the period but perhaps its best work was a programme in docu-drama format called 'Insurrection,' a series of 8 half hour programmes shown on consecutive days over Easter week 1966 and culminating with the visual of James Connolly being stretchered into Kilmainham and fading to the sounds of the executions as the commentator ponders whether this is the end or the beginning of the uprising. In class we debated Easter week, the War of Independence, the Civil war and how De Valera won the peace. Our teacher led those discussions and I think he gloried in the myth of the saga just as much as we did. This was a powerful narrative method of bringing the story of struggle to an audience and it delivered to the reader/listener/viewer an account that was later to be excised from the official historical narrative.

In his 1972 book Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland*, argued that the commemorations of 1966 inspired militant republicans and that the methods of 1916, 'violence, applied by a determined minority,' could, in their minds, bring about unity (Brennan, 2013). There was only one TV channel and we were a captive audience. The school discussion extended into the home and the memories of parents and grandparents were probed for additional information. And for those who sought it that information lay in pages of the works of Tom

Barry's *Guerrilla days in Ireland* (1949), Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (1924) and Dorothy Macardle's *Tragedies of Kerry* which are just three of a large collection of books recounting different aspects and campaigns in the struggle for Irish freedom. These books related the stories of the active service units of the republican movement during that period or in Macardle's case the atrocities carried out in Kerry by British and Free State forces. Kevin Myers, (echoing O'Brien), was caused to make the following comment; The failure to realise the connection between a celebration of 'good' violence in the past and 'bad' violence today has long been a chronic condition in Irish life. Whereas the myth of republican violence takes merely artistic form in some souls, in others it serves as a moral authoriser, like a virus that affects its hosts in different ways. (Irish Independent, 29th March, 2013). Of course the meaning of O'Brien and Myers here is quite clear, it is not that these versions of Irish history are untrue, rather it is that these versions of history do not fit into the modern official narrative and are in fact dangerous because they tell a different story to the sanitised one.

In relation to my own activism I want to outline my own history of involvement in order to be transparent perhaps about my own bias within this narrative. I had been a member of Sinn Fein the Workers Party into the late seventies and I was also an Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union activist and eventually a senior representative for the Blowing section of Waterford Crystal. I have also been a member of the short lived Socialist Labour Party formed during the late seventies by the southern district secretary of our union Matt Merrigan and by Dr. Noel Browne TD as a breakaway from the Labour party. The Waterford SLP group began the process of establishing itself through campaigning by supporting workers in dispute, involvement in housing action and by becoming part of the local support group for the Carnsore Anti-Nuclear Campaign. The Anti-Nuclear Campaign delivered perhaps the most successful social movement of the period (Dalby,1984/85. Hussey and

Craig, 1978). The lesson of the campaign was not lost on those of us who took part. During the two years or so that we were involved we had seen how a well organized campaign involving activists who were prepared to work could make a difference.

Carnsore wasn't the only issue of course and I was always willing to lend a hand when called upon and this applied to so many other actions, meetings and campaigns that I have been involved in including a 16 week strike at Waterford Crystal in 1990 and the final sit in as the receiver sought to shut down the industry in 2009 and we as a workforce sought to gain as much as we could from the disastrous situation we found ourselves in. The only mention these activists will have will be as a footnote in a book, as part of a newspaper article or in the memory of fewer and fewer people until their story, never fully told, has disappeared from the stage of history and the truth of their existence becomes the demonized caricature of their enemies who control the historical narrative. Even when the story of the labour movement is told by various authors it is the story of the movement, it is the story of leaders, it is the big story, and it is never about the foot-soldier. There is in capitalist society a need to demonise those who are willing to stand and make a difference and as the interviews show there is definitely an element of the activist being portrayed as the 'other', the dangerous unemployed working class youth from the housing estate who are going to break into your home and take all you own to pay for their drugs, Those communist shop-stewards who will close the place down if they don't ignore those safety issues or the environmentalist whose representations and observations on behalf of the community are a threat to the progress of the city even though access to the whole planning process is skewed to benefit the developer and the wealthy. These are the stories that we don't hear, mainstream media rarely carries a positive story about activists. I can sincerely say that I can't recall too many in my lifetime unless of course the activist has been dead for some time or is living and/or active in a foreign land or, as in the case of the Dunne's Stores workers anti

apartheid strike, the target of action is sourced outside of Ireland.

This then has placed me at the outset with the task of examining my own conscience with regard to my motivation. Why do this particular study? I certainly have a bias. Because of my experience I have always held a great deal of admiration for the individual who is willing to give freely of her/his time, sometimes at a personal cost, never for personal reward, to fight for the benefit of others and that is basically what the activist is doing. This study examines the role of the participant activist taking part in social movement activism, how they are empowered and how they adapt to their participation. There is a danger that these voices will be soon gone and there will be no record of them, only the occasional newspaper report that will not do justice to the activists. And it is precisely because of this that I have engaged in this research. It is an exercise in oral history, in recording the voice of the activist and also an exercise in seeking to understand the reason behind people's decision to engage in activism over an extended period of time. During the three decades from the mid sixties to the mid nineties Waterford earned a reputation where it was perceived in Ireland as a militant city. This coincides with my own progression from school to the workplace and a life spent as a craftsman in an industrial setting during which I was involved in many of these actions either directly or indirectly as a participant activist. I view this period as the age of Ireland's belated industrial revolution because of the development of the development of Ireland's industrial base, the entry of women into the workforce, the gradual movement from dependence on the agricultural sector and the encroachment of global culture. Because of the current a lack of unified resistance to austerity, I wanted to see if there are lessons from that period we can use today. The focal point of the research was to interview ten activists, six men and four women from different areas of social activism in Waterford during those years in order to develop an understanding of the role of the activist. I also wanted to record the activist's reflections of

the period as an oral history exercise. The range of activity engaged in by the activists encompassed actions in Trade Unions, occupations, fish ins, women campaigners involved in the abortion referendums (1983-2002), the H-Block campaign, the community activists who have spent decades campaigning against the ground rent/anti-water rates/anti-household charge troika of protest actions, the Iraq war(s), anti-globalisation movement and the activists and residents involved in Community Development Projects (CDP) and in the KRM (development company) inner city development project of the Celtic Tiger period. What is the root of their actions, is it purely economics, is it because they are marginalised with limited resources and limited prospects or is there a recognition of a broader agenda at play that is subtly and not so subtly changing society in a slowly evolving process wherein the hegemonic power gradually convinces us that this is the way society should be, a little tinkering with the system here, a little adjustment to the law there, mostly unseen but which from time to time causes the lives of the ordinary citizen to diminish in value. Within all of this highly contentious space is the question of the activist's ability to maintain personal sustainability, to keep going in the face of adversity and despite the constant battering from the negative brickbats that are ultimately attached to campaigning. How do they do it? The research will also look at what is the future of activism as the traditional sites for organising in the industrial and trade union world disappear. The project is intended to be the pilot for a more comprehensive account of activism and activists.

The dissertation is structured in the traditional fashion with this chapter, Chapter one, giving an outline of my research. Chapter two conducts an overview of the literature I reviewed concerning issues such as the socio-economic aspects affecting Waterford during the relevant period, it looks at the available campaign literature, examines of the historical context including the importance of history to class identity and it also reviews of the work of oral

historians. The final paragraphs of the chapter consider the work of activist and social movement theorists before concluding with an overview of the available primary resources. Chapter three is a review of the qualitative methodologies I applied including a discussion of the interview process and data analysis procedures. The chapter discusses the selection process taking consideration of how and why I chose the interviewees for the research. It also examines the difficulties of this type of research and how I dealt with problems as they arose. The fourth chapter contains the research results findings and discusses the analysis of the collected data and in chapter five there is a discussion and reflection of those findings before finally giving my concluding comments in chapter six.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter I will discuss the main literature that I have engaged to guide my research. This includes the social and economic context prevailing during the period to show where and how the activists were influenced by actions and activities both local and global, give the literary overview of the major campaigns that the participants were engaged in and, as history is a central theme of the research, I will also discuss the issue of history and in particular oral history in some detail.

Social Movements and Social Activists.

Paulo Freire described that the more radical the activist is;

...’ the more fully he or she enters into reality so that knowing it better he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.’
(*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.1996. p.21)

These words describe many of the men and women activists I have known and they make the key point that the main thing the true activist does is to stand with the oppressed in their struggle. This simple act of solidarity is for Tarrow a ‘recognition of their common interests that translates the potential for a movement into action’ (2011. p.11). Marx and Engels been the key ideological influence upon class based social movements through their depiction of modern capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The Manifesto acknowledges former class antagonisms and declares that the new epoch of capitalism had created two great hostile camps, the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. In Marx’s view the movement of history was leading inexorably towards Communism. For many activists the first theoretical frame that we are introduced to was some form of Marxist theory. However, Silvia Federici (2008,

p.3) believes that Marx was limited in his understanding of the true extent of the capitalist exploitation of labour and the function of the wage in the creation of divisions within the working class, starting with the relation between women and men. Peter Linebaugh also points to the sixties to show that the resistance was not coming from the organised ranks of labour but rather it was coming from within the silent wageless ranks of reserve labour and the marginalised. Linebaugh and Rediker in their book *The Many Headed Hydra* (2000) they show that there was a constant resistance to the resource expropriation of early developing capitalism which has to be taken into consideration and for me there is a resonance in both of those views. As Allen (2011, p.66) pointed out class is not the only division, 'society is also divided by gender, ethnicity, nationality and a host of other categories'. As a coal face activist Saul Alinsky (1989, p.35) explains that change means movement and movement means friction because 'Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict'.

The Socio-Economic context.

The Easter Rising commemoration was not to be the only influence in terms of rebellion during the 1960s for the same T.V. that gave us a glimpse of the past was also a window to the present and it brought home to us the horrors of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights protests, the struggle of the Black citizens of the United States, the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Paris streets of 1968 and the fledgling Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland towards the end of the decade. There was no escaping the fact that the world was in turmoil but there were few literary outlets where the curious appetite could be sated.

Hungry for information many young potential activists turned towards republican papers and literature such as 'The United Irishman' and the writings of James Connolly published by the Communist Party outlet, New Book Publications, to fill the void as the left turning dormant

republican movement sought to change direction and attract new recruits to their ranks through social agitation on housing, unemployment, fisheries, natural resources and so forth (Hanley & Millar 2009, Rafter, 2011). It was also during the sixties and seventies that the Irish Republic began to fulfill Lemass' ambition to develop the country as a modern nation. This period saw major changes in Irish society as the workforce moved from the field to the factory, women joined the workforce, free education was introduced, as was the development of a global mass media and its trimmings. While it certainly was not utopia the fact was that with annual growth rates between 1960 – 1973 almost trebling over the annual growth rates for the previous three decades this was a prosperous time for an Ireland coming from a very low base in living standards (Allen, 1997. Ferriter, 2012. Garvin, 2004, 2011. O'Connor, 1989, 1992. Tovey & Share, 2003). In Waterford during this period the per capita income in the city and county increased by 97% per cent (O'Connor, 1989, p. 307). Many of those who found employment in the new Industrial Estates or with developing indigenous employers like Waterford Crystal were escaping the emigrant ship or a life of casual labour. They spread their new found prosperity across the region. They bought houses on private estates supporting the growing private construction sector and they eagerly sought out all the new mod cons that the burgeoning consumer society presented to them. This new found wage wealth did not trickle down in Thatcherite fashion but because the income of the workers is spent in the local economy it created more jobs in construction and the service sector and in the process enriched many local business men.

In tandem with the growth of industry in Waterford was the growth of trade unions and of the workers representative, the shop steward. The factory is an important site or space for the development of shop stewards within the trade union movement and as industry developed in Waterford trade union activity within the workplace helped to develop activists. In the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) E.P. Thompson tries to place

the working class in its proper historical context when he argues that far from being the accidental product of capitalist development, the working class is actually a development of the workers own making as they opposed efforts to organise society in a fashion that was detrimental to the lives of working people and the social role being imposed on them. In this instance the Waterford workers were taking stock of Irish society and were cognisant of changing dynamics. Thompson considered that class is defined by men (and women presumably) as they live their own history, and, that we can't understand class unless we see it 'as a social and cultural formation arising from processes that can only be studied as they work themselves out over a long historical period' (1991. pp. 10-11). And in the end, he wrote, that is it's only definition. If we do not record working class history there can be no record or as Portelli (1997, p.viii) commented on the women survivors of the Nazi atrocity at Civitella in Italy during WW2 'History has no content without their stories'. The fifty or so years from 1780 to 1832 was the period in which Thompson considered the working people of England came to identify themselves as having different interests to the ruling and employing classes and this is, I believe, the process that the Waterford activists were engaged in, through observation of the world around them, through the message that the media delivered to them and from discussion of the issues among themselves, they were engaged in a pedagogical progression in the development of their understanding of class.

Campaigns

A key source for my research will be 'The Labour History of Waterford' by Emmet O'Connor (1989) which was commissioned by the Waterford Council of Trade Unions. The book is an exceptional general history of the Trade Union Movement in Waterford. For the purposes of my research chapter 11 (*Sowing the Wind*, 1960-1972) and chapter 12

(Reaping the Whirlwind, 1973-1988) are central sources of information. These two chapters give an account of almost 3 decades of trade union activity and action including most of the campaigns engaged in by the activists I interviewed. The tax campaign of the late seventies to the early eighties grew out of the frustration of the PAYE sector carrying the burden of taxation. In 1975 the sector accounted for 71% of all income tax revenue and this had risen to 78% by 1978. In 1979 the government dropped a proposed 2% levy on farmers as a result of protest from farmer's organizations and this set off a reaction from workers that had the ICTU and Union leaders running to catch up. Waterford Crystal stewards were to play a major role in the campaign (Allen, 1997. Hanley & Millar 2009. Kenny, 2010. Kerrigan 1983. O'Connor, 1989.) This was for many of the activists involved their first experience of the latent power of a group of committed shop stewards in organising a campaign. The democratic structure of the meetings where everyone had a voice meant that there was a sense of ownership of the campaign. At the end of the day however the action faded with a final picket on Dail Eireann and only token support from Dublin unions. As far as the powers that be were concerned the genie was back in the bottle.

In early 1980 an H-Block support group was developed in Waterford and mainly centered on the activists in the ATGWU branches many of whom were also members of the SLP but there were important key activists from within the ITGWU as well. The two major unions had the full quota of members in their delegations to the trades council and as a combined block they held sway in voting. The hunger strike had its roots in the treatment of prisoners and the dirty protest during the late seventies and by 1979-80 had developed into an issue that was forcing people to take a position on whether or not they would or could lend support to the campaign. (Beresford, 1987. Hanley and Millar, 2009. Morrison, 2006. O'Connor, 1989). Following the intervention of the local H-Block committee WCTU chose to support the H-Block campaign by a narrow margin and threw its imprimatur behind the local H-Block movement. This was

of course what the activists had worked for and in supporting hunger striker Kevin Lynch's candidacy in the 1981 general election they proved to be very resourceful campaigners.

In my exploration of the abortion referendum campaigns 1983-2002 amongst the literature I have used are booklets that were produced during the various campaigns. (C.A.I.C, 1991. Horgan,1983. Smyth,1998.). For example, *Censored- Irelands Abortion Reality*, which includes a guide to abortion services for Irish women, was produced by Cork Abortion Information Campaign in 1991. This booklet is quite useful as it was compiled in the aftermath of the 1983 referendum, just before the X case 1992, in defiance of the Censor, giving a synopsis of the historical background to the abortion issue from the 1861 act to the situation prevailing in 1991. It also outlined who the anti abortionists were an alliance between lay conservative catholic traditionalists and the church. The booklet highlights some of their comments including a comment from Meena Cribbins of the Mna na h-Eireann (Women of Ireland) group who commented that they should '... get rid of all these reformers, they're the lowest of the low, divorced and living with their fancy women, they just want to make their way respectable.' Abortion had been quite a divisive force in Irish society since the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign formed in January 1981 (Hesketh, 1990.) because of concerns with a number of legal events in the 1970s could possibly threaten the abortion ban in Ireland. It gives an update of the abortion issue up to that period and identifies and challenges the 'anti-abortionists'. The CAIC was part of a countrywide movement which has developed in response to the attack on women's right to information in recent years and allied with others they openly defied the ban on abortion information and encouraged others to do the same. Its usefulness to my research is its contemporaneous information on which I can base my interviews and use to mention specific groups and dates to prompt recall or provoke recall of other issues from the period as a guide to the actors on both sides of the referendum.

In his coverage of the other campaigns O'Connor is quite accurate and to mention any minor omissions would be to quibble, however, surprisingly, the Eight amendment referendum in 1983 is not covered in the book and although it is well within the time scale and there was an effective campaign in Waterford the role (or its failure to get involved) of the Trades Council is not clear and it raises the question why? What I feel is also missing from the book is the reaction and feelings of the participant activists involved in all these campaigns and at times it seems as if the view of the more radical actors is subsumed by the voice of the less radical. In addition the water rates campaign of the early eighties has very little literature relating to the development and conduct of this highly organized action. It was perhaps an extension of the tax campaign and the anti ground rents movement to the degree that it was a marriage of those tax equity campaigners from the Unions and the members of residents and tenants associations who opposed the archaic colonial practice of ground rent payments to absentee landlords. Again, aside from the limited accounts such as O'Connor's there is a deafening silence surrounding the history of these working class activists who have stood up in solidarity with working people and this history is an example how it is portrayed in a negative framework. For example, a brief report in the Irish Times 28th of September gives an account of a major protest in the Lismore Park area when 3 workers employed by a Wexford contractor hired by Waterford Corporation to cut off supplies to non payers were trapped by local residents and held captive in their van for seven hours by a crowd of up to one thousand people (according to the I.T.) before their release was finally negotiated and the city manager agreed not to cut off peoples water. This action was the culmination of a campaign that started in Waterford in 1984 and the activists in the community maintained a campaign over five years constantly battling cut offs and court cases until that decisive act. Even looking at sympathetic left literature such as the Socialist

Worker, the Workers Solidarity Movement or the Irish People who all give accounts of the campaign there is very little readily available recording the stories of the activists engaged in these campaigns.

The Importance of History

One of the reasons that I decided to enter education as a mature student was to try and understand the role of the working class in society, and in the course of my studies I have recognised that the history of those who I have campaigned with will rarely be told or explained properly. I think that the fact that this history is mostly ignored is an abuse of the historic narrative and is obviously ignored for the basest of ideological reasons. Harman (2008), Linebaugh and Ridaker (2000) and Zinn (1980) all explain that much of history writing leaves out the ordinary and tells the story from the specific and in their own writings they take a different approach by looking at history from the point of view of the ordinary people. Even earlier, in the sixteenth century, a Dominican friar, Bartholome De La Casas, was one of those who exposed the genocide of the native people Latin America by the Spanish conquistadors, a tale that runs contrary to the official discourse. For this reason, it was handed down in the past in the oral tradition and in written chronicle and its research is mostly publically funded. But sometimes, the social purpose of history is obscured where the academics pursue knowledge for its own sake, or, at the other extreme, the social purpose of history can be quite blatant in providing justification for war, for revolution or for the rule of one class by another. Jenkins (2003) and Carr (1990) indicate that history is constructed from the particular set of facts that a particular historian assembles to represent the point of view that he wants to portray. For politicians, history is a treasury of supporting symbolism. However, Thompson indicates that there are just as many gaps in the presentation of history. He points to the potential for oral history projects to

be used as tools in development work where it would take place only with an explicit social purpose which is to help people in the developing world and Indigenous people such the American Indian, or for that matter Irish Travellers, sustain their cultures and support their claims to traditional rights.

Alun Munson (Jenkins 2003. pp.xi- xiii) reflects that the histories we assign to things are composed, created, constructed, and always situated literatures and that these literatures carry within them the philosophers take on the world past, present and future, that history and the past are not the same thing and that as a form of knowledge history is a narrative representation. The argument is that history is always written for someone with a purpose in mind and that purpose is never something that's innocent but rather is something that is always ideological and therefore the logic of history is not one of discovery but of construction. Does this mean that all historical accounts are valid or that the only criterion we can use to judge them is ideological intent? I don't think so because history is epistemologically fragile and one of the reasons for this is that no account of history can ever recount the past as it was because the past is not an account but a series of events, situations etc., and because the past is gone the only way an account of an event can be checked is against another account and not against the actual event. Therefore history must rely on someone else's eye and voice. We see through an interpreter who stands between past events and our reading of them. History is what historians make it. However it is when history is put back into the power relations within the social and when different groups take history to use as a support for or against one ideological purpose or another that it becomes problematic in the sense of how it is used or abused.

Oral History

In considering the concept that 'all history has been oral history at some point' it appealed to

me as the appropriate tool to use in my research to record and relay the activist's stories. It is clear that there are many versions of history as the writers and historians above have indicated and these histories are written for a specific purpose which is to legitimise a particular narrative, and more often than not, as pointed out, that narrative is the official one. In his work, Alessandro Portelli (1991, 1997), has used oral history to tell the story of the struggles of Italian activists, workers, anti-fascists and also of the Appalachian coal mining area of Harlan County. Portelli encompasses in his writing is the feelings of the individual as a member of a community and as an active player in an historical context. He takes the narrative of the ordinary man or woman and places it in history not as history but as an element in a story where the interviewer gives the interviewee the opportunity to reconstruct their life history with all 'its contradictions and difficulties'. This is what I want to achieve, to tell this story in which I also have had a part, a participatory role that lends me the legitimacy to approach the activists and say let me tell your story. There are many examples of authors using the interview to record the stories that are the building blocks of the global narrative (Appy (2008), Dolci (1959), Garavan (2006), Hall (2012), O'Malley & Horgan (2012), Terkel (1970, 1974, 2006)). The subject matter of these books range from poverty in Sicily in the fifties, the story of participants in both sides the Vietnam war, the disappearing industrial worker of Britain, Terkel's interviews dealing with different aspects of American life and in Garavan's case the participatory account of the central activists in the Shell to Sea campaign in Mayo. Dolci allows the poor of Sicily to tell their story, through interviews and mostly without comment avoiding the view or the opinion of the expert, even a sympathetic one, so as to allow the people themselves to express their views and opinions about their lives and status. The great difficulty for those without power is that their story is not told in the official discourse as I discovered in all of the interviews I carried out and as David Hall (2012) commented on the demise of the industrial worker in his book

‘Working Lives’,

A whole way of life has gone and the voices of those who laboured in the ‘workshop of the world’ in its last days are now largely ignored and forgotten. (p.10)

The key to these accounts is in the voice of the people who have lived the experience and it is in amplifying the activist voice that that their narrative is empowered. Halls commentary would not be out of place if it was applied to Waterford. In many ways the demise of industry in what was an industrial town leaves a vast chasm into which the hopes of the working class have been toppled.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction.

In this chapter I will discuss the rationale behind the methodological approach adopted in this study and how it has best served the exploration of the topic. First, in a statement of purpose I will outline my reasons for undertaking the study. I will then continue by explaining the approach I took towards developing my own strategy for the research involved in this project. The chapter will also explain in detail how I decided to select the participants for the study and then reflect on the difficulties and advantages of the chosen method. The conduct of the interviews will also be discussed in all aspects including the type of interview, the duration of each interview and the location of the interview. From this point the chapter will give an outline of how the interpretation and analysis of the collected data from the interviews was approached. Finally the chapter will conclude with a short discussion around the limitations of this type of study and also discuss the ethical issues regarding the rights and privacy of the research participants.

Purpose of the Study.

The aim of this research is to explore activism and social activists. In the first instance I wanted to explore the experiences of social activists in Waterford City and environs during the period. I also hoped to gain an insight in the interviews of the opinion of the activists as to the current role of activists and social activism within the community. In accepting the view of Bryman (2008. pp.69-71) open ended research can be risky and can lead to the collection of too much data I decided to use a number of questions as guiding

principles. I did not use the questions directly in the interviews, but, at all times they helped in steering the research. As indicated in chapter 1 those questions revolved around motivation, the type of campaigns, strategy, proactive or reactive involvement, were the actions rooted in marginalization, inequality, the failure of politics, how was individual and group sustainability maintained and, of course, what does the future hold for the activist at this local level?

Qualitative Methods

Bryman (2008, p.21) looks at research strategy and considers that many writers on methodological issues find it helpful to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research and he also finds that it represents a useful means of classifying different methods of social research. Simply put quantitative research employs measurement whereas qualitative research does not. Quantitative research is about testing theories, qualitative research is about generating theories. In this instance the participants are also stakeholders as am I as the researcher, therefore there is a mutual interest in ensuring a meaningful outcome from my work. This research was based on a qualitative methodology. There are a variety of considerations that enter into the process of doing social research including the nature of the relationship between theory and research and whether it is theory as an inductive guide or whether it is theory as a deductive outcome, the epistemological issues concerned with our knowledge, or our world view, of the social world, the ontological issues of being and how all these relate to the two types of research strategies, quantitative and qualitative research. Crotty (1998, p.2) considers that when we develop a research proposal we need to put considerable effort into answering two questions in particular. And those two questions are what methodologies and methods will be used and how is the choice of those methodologies and methods justified? The justification of our

choice is at the heart of the process and reaches into the understanding that we have of what human knowledge is. What kind of knowledge do we believe will be attained by our research and what characteristics do we believe knowledge to have and here we are touching on the heart of the matter which is the way the observers of our research perceive what we lay before them and for what reason should they take it seriously? These are the epistemological questions and Crotty carefully outlines his definition of each of the questions;

What *methods* are to be used. He describes *methods* as the techniques or procedures to be used to gather and analyse data related to some research question.

What *methodology* governs our choice and use of methods. The *methodology* strategy Crotty defines as a plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and the use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.

What *theoretical perspective* lies behind the methodology in question. This is the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.

What *epistemology* informs this theoretical perspective. Epistemology, Crotty says, is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.

This then has placed me at the outset with the task of examining my own conscience with

regard to my motivation. My view has always been that of a world ‘badly divided’ and that this is not by accident but as a result of the type of economic system, the capitalist system, that governs the structure of society. Crotty (p.7) explains that our theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that lies behind our methodology in which we attempt to explain how it provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria. He argues that we bring a number of assumptions to our chosen methodology, that we should state what these assumptions are and that this is what we do when we elaborate on our theoretical perspective. Harding (1987. p.2) defines methodology as a theory and analysis of how research should proceed while Kaplan, (1967. p.18) sees it as the study, the description in Carter and Little, , the explanation and the justification of methods and not the methods themselves (both cited 2007. p.2). Basically, methodology provides the justification for the methods of a research project and Harding describes methods as techniques for gathering evidence. Crotty, (1998, p.3) describes methods as the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis, in other words methods are the tools that the researcher uses to set about his/her work. Carter and Little (2007, p.1318) describe method as research action. Research methods are the practical activities of research: sampling, data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting. In other words, by adapting Carter and Little’s model, the process is that epistemology justifies and evaluates knowledge and with that knowledge it modifies or informs methodology which in turn justifies, guides and evaluates method that produces the data and analysis that are the basis of knowledge which of course feeds back into epistemology. In working with the participants in the interview to try an understand activism I used a constructivist theoretical perspective in this research and the methodology used was grounded theory. The methods used were interviewing, sampling, focus group, narrative accounts, observation, data reduction and analysis. The methods

ensured that the dialogue between the researcher and the participants developed in an organic fashion enriched by the contributions of both.

One of the first tasks in a research project is to decide who are the people to be included in the study and random selection is the most common method of determining who will take part but Stringer (2007, p.45) points out that qualitative research requires a different process which he says is often called purposeful interviewing that consciously selects people on the basis of a particular set of attributes and that the most important attribute is the extent to which a group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or issue of interest. Hall and Hall (1996, p.107) in their discussion on representativeness posit that because of the possibility of bias relying on the researchers own judgment as to who to include in the study is not the best way of achieving representativeness and that neither will a large sample guarantee unbiased representativeness because of the danger of under representation of some groups and they argue that the best way of ensuring that the sample is representative of the population concerned is to use random methods of selection. However, they do note that practical research goes on in the real world and cite (Rose.1982, p. 59) who warns that while representative sampling should be looked on as an ideal-type which, for a variety of reasons, is unlikely to be achieved in the majority of studies and they offer that in certain circumstances when access to the population is difficult or restricted that a judgment sample may help the researcher to obtain as wide a representative group as possible taking account of likely sources of difference in their views and experiences.

‘Readers should be informed of the number and type of people who participated in the investigation...and the way the participants were chosen...so they will understand the sources of information. Researchers particularly need to identify the principle stakeholders- those most affected by the issue- and other important groups who have contributed to the study’. (Stringer, 2007. p.177)

This was a major factor in my selection of participants taking Stringers advice into account and the sample method I used was the judgment sample because of the limited availability of the target population. Waterford is not a large city. It has a population of around fifty thousand so the number of activists in the target community while large for the population size is in reality a small group. Therefore I chose to select people for the roles they have played in activism and also because of the wide cross section of campaigns they were involved in and of course most importantly, their ability to talk. The participants were four women and six men and again the only reason for this is the roles and actions they have been involved in. As a researcher I must point out that all but one would be known to me because of my own involvement in campaigns and because of this the participants recognised and understood that my motivation for this project is genuine. In dealing with the relationship between the participant and the interviewer Portelli (www.swaraj.org, 2013, p. 2) explains that oral history is a listening art that is based on a set of relationship including the relationship between interviewees and interviewers (dialogue). He writes that the interview is based on common ground which makes dialogue possible but it is also based on difference which makes it meaningful. This played a role in my interviews as there was common ground in my own activism and comradeship but there was also difference in that the interviewee was taking the opportunity to elaborate on their personal view of a particular action and explain why and how.

The level of activity by the people is phenomenal and this made it relatively easy to select the sample group. I should also point out that one of the women is my partner and because of this I decided not to interview her in the traditional fashion but instead to interview her in company with one of the other women as part of a focus group. Bryman (2008) cites Merton et al (1956, p.3) commenting that one of the reasons focus groups are brought

together is because they are known to have been involved in a particular situation and they discuss that involvement. The focused nature of the interview gave a rich discussion between both participants and allowed me, as the researcher, to sit back and observe the interaction at play. The interviews were carried out either in the activist's homes or in various venues that included a community centre, a campaign office and a union office. There are other factors as to why it is not always possible to get a truly representative sample in a qualitative study but in this instance I am happy enough with the group assembled because of their level of activity and their leadership roles. The age profile of the sample is mostly people in their fifties with two in their sixties and one over seventy. The reason for this is that to be active in the campaigns under consideration the participants would have to be born in the early sixties at the latest. The fact that they are all of a certain age means of course that they will have some similar experiences but also some fundamental differences. One of the obvious differences is gender but there are also political and ideological differences between the group, not to the extent that it caused difficulty but they were of varied political traditions from republican to Trotskyist to environmentalism, trade unionism and the women's movement.

Within my particular sample and based upon my own experience within the campaigns I have skewed the numbers more towards an even gender balance than that which existed within the campaigns with the exception of the 8th amendment and the X case where there was by far more women activists than men. However, the women participants have probably a wider range of experiences because of that engagement with abortion issues and also because of the greater role they have played as activists within the Community Development programmes. I find from this experience that in dealing with a subject that is narrative based you are confined by having to find people who are willing to talk, finding people who can tell

the story, and who are genuine in what they are talking about. Making the decision in this instance was easy as the activist reputation of people I interviewed preceded them.

A major advantage of the interview is its adaptability...to follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings which the questionnaire can never do. Giddens (1993, p.696) believes of life histories that no other method of research can give us as much detail about the development of people's beliefs and attitudes over time. The type of interview I chose to use was the unstructured interview. The advantage of this was to allow the participants to discuss the topics in an unconstrained and open fashion thereby creating an interview that is more natural than a formal interview with a highly structured schedule. The unstructured interview uses a list of topics to be covered. In this instance I utilised a number of major topics around the experience of being an activist and being involved in campaigns and movements. For example if the activist was more prominent in one campaign such as the fish ins at Lismore Castle I focused on that as a key point in the discourse. In addition, prior to explaining the aims of my research to the individual participants I took the time to consider the participants activities that could possibly be relevant to the project and then I included those actions in our initial discussion both to clarify my own information and to help the interviewee to gather his/her thoughts before the formal interview. To a degree these guided the interviews and allowed scope for expansion of the conversation when required. I was aware that there are a number of pitfalls that may encumber the interviewer. Bryman (2008, pp.444-445) highlights these possible obstacles to a good interview. The areas of environmental problems such as background noise, own bias and expectations intruding into the interview, maintaining focus in probing answers and asking follow-up questions, sensitive issues where-by the question(s) may cause upset, and in transcription that may be more difficult than expected are all discussed. My own experience would tend to support Bryman's advice. For instance arranging a suitable time for an interview can prove to

be difficult as you are imposing into another's busy schedule so sometimes you have to take what is offered despite the fact that it may not be the best time or location. In one of my interviews I met my contact in a college canteen that quickly became a very noisy environment and although we persevered with the interview the transcription of it was very difficult. Bryman also points to the criteria for a successful interview and advises that the interviewer be knowledgeable and I was familiar with the focus of the interview, structuring the interview and being clear in asking questions, gentle and sensitive in dealing with the interviewee, open to respond flexibly to what is important, critical in being prepared to challenge what is being said such as inconsistencies, remembering what has been previously said and interpreting statements without imposing meaning on them. He also adds being balanced in not saying too much or too little to the interviewee and to be ethically sensitive ensuring that the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially. In applying this advice I found that it is mostly a guide to good interview manners but where I did find a difficulty was in critically challenging inconsistencies because I felt if I contested part of the commentary it could stray into causing guarded comment or argument and possibly resulting in the failure of the interview.

The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and then the data was transferred to a file on the researchers PC to enable storage and transcription. Through the transcription process I found that the researcher can really come to hear the content of the interview giving a deeper understanding of what has been said. I introduced the recorder almost from the first moment of meeting and made it visible to the participant while engaging in small talk then I turned on the recorder informing the participant but continuing the small talk. Portelli (1997, p.9) comments that by opening the conversation, the interviewer, defines the

roles and establishes the basis of narrative authority. I opted to open the engagement with general conversation, explaining the equipment and gradually introducing the topic. Then when I felt the atmosphere relax I would ask the question ‘tell me something about yourself and how you became involved in...’ and this was the cue for the participant to tell me their account and it was particularly interesting to see how the narrative could flow without me making any interruption. The interviews took between one hour and one hour and a half. The earlier interviews were carried out close together but I soon realised that each interview was possibly a key to developing the next one so I slowed down the process. Table 1 below gives an overview of the participants.

Table 1.

Interview Participants Profile Overview					
	Gender	Age Bracket	Employment status	Political Org.	Union
Int. 1	Female	Early forties	Community Worker	Non Party	No
Int.2	Male	Late fifties	Unemployed	WP	No
Int.3	Male	Seventies	Tradesman	WP	Yes
Int.4	Male	Sixties	Disability	SWP	Yes
Int.5	Female	Late forties	Community Worker	Non Party*	Yes
Int.6	Male	Sixties	Unemployed	SWP	Yes
Int.7	Male	Early fifties	Self-employed	Non Party*	Yes
Int.8	Male	Late forties	Lecturer	Non Party*	Yes
Int.9a	Female	Mid fifties	Development Worker	Non Party*	Yes
Int.9b	Female	Early fifties	Lecturer	Non Party*	Yes
Those with asterisk have been members of a political Party at some point in their lives.					

Analysis.

For the analysis I decided to phase the activist’s lives in a manner that allowed for comparisons between histories and sought a tool that would allow a simplified method of dividing and analysing the research. The question was how to develop a coherent analysis of the topic and do justice to the participant’s stories by ensuring that I remain true to the

intention of their words which was to explain their role as activists to an unknown and unknowing audience. Hall and Hall (pp.198-200) advise that it is important to consider first how researchers make sense of data because the information generated may not be quite what was expected. Charmaz (2006, p.96) describes this process as seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory. So theoretical sampling begins with a general research question and the researcher starts to sample theoretically through data collection which is then purposively analysed for concepts or categories until theoretical saturation is reached (which means you have got all there is to be got from this particular set of data and question) and where a hypotheses is developed and the process can begin again. Charmaz (2012, p.2) asks the question why use grounded theory and goes on to outline the positive scope of the concept with her definition that grounded theory is a systematic method of analysing and collecting data to develop middle range theories. It begins but does not end with inductive inquiry, it's a method that is iterative, comparative and interactive. She considers that the emphasis in grounded theory is on the analysis of data with early data collection informing further data collection. It is a method for studying processes, it is also a method in process. Charmaz (2012, p.4) explains how to use grounded theory referring to the fact that most qualitative studies address the why and how questions and proposing that grounded theory gives the tools for to get to the answer why from an interpretive stance. The strength of grounded theory is in analysing data and the emerging ideas throughout the process from the start of data collection meaning that from the start the process is developing and forming as the researcher is analysing. Charmaz is attuned to concepts such as power, privilege, equity and oppression. Recommending initial line by line coding particularly for interview data, this also means a label at the end of each line, which I found to be a painstaking way to begin but it does mean an active, close, line by line engagement with the text. I tended to label fuller sentences rather than just trying to make

sense of a single line. The following lines from Interview 6, p.23 give an example of what I did;

‘I remember going up to P. D.’s house in M. Park there was about 6 of us, this was when we were in the Waterford Socialist Movement, 6 of us went up there, this was a study group’. (Organising)

‘And who was the leading man was L. C.. L. was... we were going through the Communist Manifesto, and we going through the parts we didn’t understand and which for me was most of it ... (Educating)

‘and the going through all that but anyway we were getting stuff poured in from all angles... from different groups you know putting in their stuff,’ (Confusing)

These three sentences show that in those early days the activist was part of a group who were trying to organise a socialist organisation in Waterford without too much of an idea of what they wanted and so were dependent on those of their colleagues who were more *au fait* with what was possible in terms of the available options.

However, Charmaz also advises that you only conduct line by line coding using the gerund, an action word, to form the coding until you have the codes that you want to explore and in the following sentences you can see how the discussion on the 1983 eight amendment referendum introduces feminism in Ireland into the discussion creating a broader code for further exploration.

‘It created a terrible, terrible atmosphere, that amendment in ’83, it really did. But in one way it created the debate that wasn’t there before, it started the debate and people were out and you knew where people stood on the campaign so in terms, you know it did highlight the issue... And brought those arguments to the fore you know. It politicised people and it... feminism was starting to be openly talked about and women’s issues, whereas women before were seen as mothers and that.’ (Interview 9a, p.5)

This indicates that with experience the process can be speeded up, it also means that a practiced researcher will see trends pretty early. Glaser (2012, p.3) alludes to the adaptability

of grounded theory and in this light, Charmaz (2006, pp.143-145) points to Biernacki's Theory of a Basic Social Process as an example and this I found helpful because it fitted in with how my own understanding of how the activists narrative development process was emerging. I also referred to a study by Kaminski et al, (2000) that helped to make sense of patterns in my own data.

Ethics

'As researchers we have a 'duty of care' in relation to all the people we engage in processes of investigation' (Stringer. 2007. p.55). I provided the participants with a written outline providing information as to the purpose of the study, explaining its aims and its procedures and inviting them to sign a written consent form acknowledging their willingness to take part in my study. I informed them that they have the right to refuse to participate, that they may withdraw at any time, that all data and information will be stored safely under NUIM standards and that a copy of their transcript would be provided to them at as soon as possible. Finally I informed them that their anonymity as far as practically possible would be safe guarded. However because this study is essentially a participatory action research project I feel that there is a deeper sense of responsibility upon the researcher in respect to the participant outside of the 'official' principles and guidelines. When I record and interpret the information I receive I will not be disappearing to the hallowed halls of academia but in fact I will be sitting next to the participant at the next public meeting or standing next to her at the next protest. This is something that Portelli commented on when he wrote that; 'Ultimately, in fact ethical and legal guidelines only make sense if they are the outward manifestation of a broader and deeper sense of personal and political commitment to honesty and to truth'(1997. p.55). The oral historian has to have a personal respect for the people we work with and an intellectual respect for the information and stories we become privy to.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are presented. As already stated the data was collected from the series of nine interviews with ten interviewees. The analysis consists of a close study of the text using grounded theory and each interview was initially analysed three times. I am going to use the data from the study to explain how the activists I interviewed developed their activism. The labels I have applied are merely to aid simplifying the story of each participant and to help me illustrate aspects of the story that I consider relevant or important. Through the stories of the participants I have found that the activist develops over time through formative experiences that can include a process of socialisation in the family, in society, through peer association, in the workplace, in the school and through the individual's personal journey and personal development. Most importantly though is a desire to stand up for those with little power, to become involved in class struggle and to try and make a difference.

Consciousness rising.

Each of the participants outlined influences in their early days with regard to developing their activism. They appear to be in a process forming a world view that is not willing to accept the status quo and indeed they are creating a mindset that questions the dominant hegemony in their particular space. The majority seem to have grown up in an environment where issues of a class or of a republican nature were freely expressed as part of the family conversation. For example in the following extract the participant has access to republican literature and he also has a family relationship to an active republican,

‘I think the first thing that I can remember is that I found a copy of the United Irishman and read it and was greatly influenced by it but didn’t know how to... contact anybody about it... my uncle Davy had been, of course, in the Curragh and in my young days there were a lot of prisoners in jail and he was always collecting for the prisoners dependents and... I became involved with him in that activity’ (Interview 3, p.1)

A further participant also had an early republican influence but it came with a considered reflection as to what could be,

‘The first thing I can remember is being down on the quay, there was a series of demonstrations and it must have been around sixty... sixty one, it must have been around the IRA border campaign cause Al Ryan figured very much in it, I remember going down the quay in a procession after a public meeting down on the quay and I think we were heading for [Fianna Fail TD] Fad Browne’s house to picket it and they were chanting for something or other and I remember thinking why aren’t we looking for more children’s allowance, I was about, I think about thirteen at the time..., and that was probably the first political thought I ever had in me life!’ (Interview 6, p 1).

Other participants grew up in families where political discussion and debate was part and parcel of their daily family conversation,

‘Well, I would have always been politically aware from a very young age and my brother would have been in the Young Socialists Party at the time... but my whole family were political in terms of, my father being a republican, a nationalist republican in that sense, other parts of the family would have moved from the Labour Party to Sinn Fein. So you were having those arguments and debates going on. (Interview 9 A, p.7)

This was also the case for this participant where again there was a family history of activism in the republican socialist mode and also a connection to the Spanish civil war.

‘...both my grandfather and grand uncles were involved and ____ went to Spain and my grandfather did jail and my grand uncles, as Republicans (Interview 5, p.2)

Living in a large family in crowded conditions and in the type of poverty that often existed within many big families in Ireland can also bring about a desire to understand the reason for this and it sometimes helps to develop a political awareness that there is something not right

about it. Being part of a large family often meant going out to work at a young age or sometimes, because of the lack of resources, it meant that things were missed in terms of the development of the person.

‘There was eight of us in the family, right, and I suppose at that time in the sixties when you came to a certain age you went out and worked. Now I know fourteen is an awful young age to be going out to work but most of us left home at the same age like, my brothers went to England and sisters went to England when they were fifteen and sixteen because there was nothing, there was nothing in Ireland’. (Interview 2, p.1)

And in this situation the child often develops a determination and a strength that can only come from the experience of want or of knowing the value of that which has not been offered to them. In the following comment the participant’s words are the best illustration of how that loss can lead to a determination to ensure that others do not suffer the same fate.

‘ ... when I was growing up as I said I’m one of ten and I would have been very quiet and the fact I think it was because I went to a slow learners school, I felt that the education system failed me and I found it hard to mix because of where I went to school... there were a lot of children there that was very badly retarded and they hadn’t got enough facilities for them so they were mixed up with us and we were kinda minding them and the teachers just, they couldn’t teach us properly... You could only barely read and do spellings, even maths like, you’d do one and one is two and you multiply and you take away and that was it. Today I wouldn’t have a clue how to do long division or anything like that to be honest about it and I always swore if I ever had kids I’d go anywhere to make sure that were getting the proper support through the education system because I think it’s wrong if a child don’t get their full needs met around education’. (Interview 1, p.6)

The school could also be the site for developing consciousness where from time to time the students decided that their rights were being over looked, ignored or just simply in the view of the powers that be they as mere students didn’t have any rights. This is an account of rebellion in a convent school in the early seventies.

‘... I remember...it’s about taking action and doing something against authority, I suppose. I remember one of my friends became pregnant in fifth year and she

left school and we were all in school and she was marrying the chap and they wouldn't let us out to the church to see her getting married so we all stood up and walked out and that's me first memory off it. We were called into a big assembly the next day and read the riot act but... feck it , we didn't care, we did the right thing anyway'. (Interview 5, p.1)

Something relatively unimportant was blown up into a confrontation between the school management and the students who could see that it is possible to challenge authority and that for some of them was a valuable lesson for the future. The following participant explains it is possible to join something and in the process develop your political thinking further. The interview points to an awareness of environmental issues that led the participant to join the Greens but then within the Greens the individual's political stance developed further and finally led to a parting of the ways because this activists growing awareness of wider issues exposed what he considered to be a weakness in the philosophy of the Greens.

'I was kind of interested generally in justice per se but...the environmentalist stuff kind of grabbed me so I joined the green party and through that I came to see the bigger picture because its not just about the environment, there's a human side to the environment you know, you're not going to keep the world pristine, you got to feed people and have a space that's socially fit for people to live in so I broadly came to see that...' (Interview 8, p.1)

The participants continue to develop their consciousness, constantly revising and categorising new ideas, knowledge and a sense of voice. The activist is ready to act, is in the throes of understanding individual agency but sometimes, despite youthful exuberance, the budding activist took a fall.

'...you came under pressure from management via time and motion people who came around and management told you these fellas were experts and...they had scientific knowledge (laughs) almost and they were going to do a study over a few days. What we didn't know at the time that about the only scientific thing about it was the fucking stop watch...and what we noticed about it at the time was the study was done on the basis of optimum conditions that was never the

case... So, I got involved in arguing that we shouldn't be accepting that this was fu... science at all and also that there should be allowances for optimum conditions that they were saying so...I got sacked anyway as a consequence I got told... called into the office with a few other fellas... and we were told that our cards were ready and we wouldn't be needed on Monday and this was I think Wednesday ..they were giving us the two days and when we looked for the Union... they said 'oh no this is all sorted with the Union and all that, So we couldn't do much about it, we were only young fellas at the time'. (Interview 4, pp. 4-5)

This was a tough lessons for the young workers but not unusual. However an activist having made a conscious decision to make a stand will not break and run at the first defeat but will put the experience to good use. There was a wider influence as well that was to have a greater bearing upon the developing consciousness as the age of mass media was born and the pictures relayed from across the Atlantic, from France and Europe of the horrors of the Vietnam war and the anti Vietnam war movement, the civil rights movement, the student/worker movement in France. All of this was going on in the world of '68/'69.

'It was that a group of us were, outside the factory, well.. these are very radical times in terms of working class activity, ya know the whole thing in America with the civil rights movement, the big strike in France in 1968, the big anti-Vietnam thing, you know the whole student thing exploded and you know the effect that had in Ireland as well, but it also rippled down to young people in factories and other areas of employment who were, because television was new at that stage and people were exposed to it and some people were influenced by it. So we were influenced by it like that and also the local branch of the labour party had set up a youth branch, labour youth and a lot of young people flocked into that, about forty young people and were beginning to engage in social activism... from painting people's houses eh, to arguing against the next government that Labour should participate in coalition with and what have ya. So that was going on the outside and in addition to that you had the civil rights movement in the North that was emerging and you had the emergence of Sinn Fein... it was gathering a lot of younger people sort of around it...' (Interview 6, p.6)

All of the participants indicated a developing consciousness before joining an organisation or group. They also attribute their growing awareness to a wide range of influences and many had a considerably developed position before they took the next step of active membership.

Entering the Movement.

The point of entry is the period where the activist, has built up confidence in personal abilities and confidence. The individual meets that moment when they become an activist and get involved in the organisation. What characterises this period is that the activist develops a sense of voice and a willingness to step forward. Often it can be a case of peer pressure urging action. This activist became an active union member and shop steward through the encouragement of older members in the late seventies and she notes the fact that at that time there were no other women at the Branch meetings.

‘And the Amalgamated Transport Union I found at the time welcomed women and you know... certainly there were key people...and showed certain leadership you know and were very left-wing, it had an influence I definitely think it had an influence, because I was encouraged to go to branch meetings at the time where there would have been no women and that was definitely from a left wing point of view you know, seeing women and encouraging women at the time’.
(Interview 9A, p.22)

It was also be the case that the activists made their own way to discover a base for themselves within activism, making a space for themselves to add their voice and support to the cause.

‘How I came to be involved in that was I went to a local centre for support on something and I like what was going on there and I got involved in the place and there was a social justice group being formed...a couple of people who were concerned about things where we saw blatant discrimination, racism and inequality and that was with Travellers...with rights for Traveller people and along with some Travellers but not an awful lot we would have done a lot of work around supporting Travellers rights, for accommodation services, looking for health... better health services, that kind of thing. But the organisation that was there was very much a social services type of approach and after a couple of years I would have seen that this while it was good and it provided services it wasn’t the most empowering of organisations for the Traveller people themselves, so then, over the years I would have been involved in the setting up

of the organisation of the community development traveller project...' (Interview 5, p.3)

For other activists entry could be through the admiration of the work of another activist with a track record of action and also the literature used by an organisation can be a motivating factor in helping someone to develop their ideas. There are also the times of threat when there is no time to develop skills, that what is required is action and so the activist must take up the battle.

'... we were really only people who were learning, you know that kind of way, and by listening to them and going to meetings and listening, we got little bits of information and we got stronger and stronger through the stuff we were doing. Regan came to me one time anyway...no it was ___ who got me started in these politics and I got involved with him and _____, canvassing for him in the eighties, then you had a lot of protests, you had the water rates, you had different things coming up, people being brought down to the courts and things like that. Standing up for the working man really ...because ah...with the water rates now a lot of the people involved were in the Glass Factory and the women were left alone at home and if you got a phone call, although there were very few phones, the very minute you got word of mouth you were up and gone to try and do something to stop it in its stride [turning off the water]. That's how I got involved in the politics side of it but the _____ end of it I was involved in since I came out. (Interview 2, p.4).

There is no escaping from the white heat of the battle when you are engaged in a primitive piece rate system that will dictate your wages, and, has inbuilt faults that are detrimental to establishing fairness to all the workers and in particular fairness for the apprentice.

'So the next thing I suppose was because the way the place that I worked in the cutting shop in the glass factory because of the way it was organised... production or what have you, there was a master cutter and... essentially there was a couple of journeymen who were qualified craftsmen and then there'd be a group of apprentices ranging from maybe a first year to maybe a fourth year, there could be four apprentices, a master and a journeyman, a qualified man. There was a pure piece rate system there and essentially there had been a strike in July of 65 over the piece rate system, absolute frustration with it and there

was a settlement but the settlement was on the basis that the company would bring in an expert to draw up a new system, the lads went on strike for 2 weeks, they didn't picket the factory, they stayed down in the park for 2 weeks and the cutters split at that time because there was the flat cutters and the wedge cutters ... it was all the one committee and both sides of the craft were represented on the committee but they obviously weren't been hit as hard as the wedge so they stayed in work and the lads stayed down the park... (Interview 6, p4-7)

The threat as an incentive to activism is also apparent in the 'debate' on abortion rights that reared its ugly head in the late seventies, early eighties and has continued to the present. However the campaign for women's control over their reproductive rights has also continued to stand up to that challenge.

B; 'You think that now with the power of the Church kind of becoming weaker and weaker, you'd think that there should have been a different kind of discourse going on about abortion and women and it seems that it's getting even worse now'!

A: 'It's interesting because back then there was a huge women's discussion in women's groups and so on but then there were disagreements I suppose and I think they were quite taken by surprise with the right-wing and how organised that they were ... that pro-life amendment campaign got full of steam and they were bulldozing away through and it was really, I think, people were caught by surprise with them, saying what is this all about? Why do you need an amendment and all that and it was really trying to galvanise... trying to get people going then because suddenly it was like, oh! this could be happening, they could be talking to them, (Govt.) they had been calling for an amendment before, about two years before that and were saying sure Jesus we're not going to go that backward but they, all the government parties leaders were saying, yeah, we'll give you a referendum, we'll give you that thing, you can go and amend the constitution, you know, we'll agree to it. Jesus before we knew where we were, we had a campaign for an amendment! But look, it was the control of the Church on the right-wing, I mean it was really hard to believe, well it's not hard to believe but back then it was very much so, I mean people involved in the campaigns as we were in the 1983 amendment thing, teachers and that were very much afraid to come out and say anything about it in case their jobs would be in jeopardy...'

B: In fact I remember a couple of women, well especially one woman who was working for the Corporation or something like that and we were on a demonstration, something we were on the Quay I vaguely remember and because there was some guards arriving, I remember this woman hiding herself

so although she felt very strongly about the issue and you know she was a militant at that moment, she felt like her life and her job in jeopardy and she had to hide! (Interview 9, pp.3-4)

Engagement.

Engaging is when the activist is playing a full role in its activities and is also the point in the activist's development that there is a mentoring input from within the group which the activist clearly identifies as supportive. This can be in response to organisational policy but more often than not it could be the friendly guidance of a veteran or through the unofficial structures during a chat over pint with other activists. It has similarities to entry but the activist is also capable of taking on tasks. It is also the period when that peer support strengthens the activist.

'as I said, B. helped me to get back into education by getting eh, going up to the group link under the women's network doing a little course and when I went in I said well this is a start to help me to get a bit of confidence around me reading and me writing. Now when I went in there the first week I found it very very hard because we were thrown all these leaflets and books about what we were going to do around fitness and maths and when I saw the maths I really got scared cause I said I'll never be able for that and... I actually got so upset the first week that I said I'm not going back the second week and I got a phone call from one of the women, her name was ____, she was the coordinator at the time and she said will you come and see me and I said I will, and I was after ringing B. telling her that I don't know if I'll be able for it, I said I feel so ashamed that I can't understand some of the work and she said "look ____ give yourself a change, they're there to help, you'll be fine, you know what you're talking about, you're helping in the community, you know and you will enjoy it" she said so I said ok I'll go up and I went up and I met _____. (Interview 1, pp.6-7)

In the Trade Union movement mentoring has always played a positive role in building strong sections and nurturing young activists. Sometimes the role was filled by a senior steward or by an official with a progressive attitude as these two activists testify. To the first steward this attitude was in contrast to previous experience,

‘...but a new official came in, Geraghty, and he actually encouraged what we were thinking, he said don’t call me, I only come here to sign off on agreements. Seamus Geraghty yeah, and he said operate on the basis... you know... if you need any help with legislation, laws and stuff but otherwise I’m your paid servant, use your own strength here and educate yourselves and if the boss calls, I’ll tell them they have to deal with the shop steward and deal with the committee and that was what happened by and large.’ (Interview 4, p.10)

Geraghty’s influence was to have a profound effect on a lot more of the young stewards who were just taking that step into the era of engagement and with his support they were quite prepared to take on those issues which they felt needed to be addressed.

‘But we set up the pressure group right, we decided that we had to try and confront the bullying, also there were other issues like the forty hour week, we decided that we should contest elections right, we did all of those things, right, we also at the same time met a man called Seamus Geraghty who was to have a lot of influence on me and on a lot of other people I think. So we did confront them... and the thing with Geraghty that stuck with me all my life was Geraghty said when we going in... what this is all about is winning the shop floor, whoever controls the shop floor controls the factory, he said, it’s no use he said if you’re saying to the boss I’m going to get the branch secretary out here cause he said they’ll get the branch secretary when they want him, they won’t get him when you want him, he said that anything that they want to do they have to be able to come to you as the shop steward and say that we’re going to do this and we’re going to do that and he said you need to get to the stage where they’re going to come to you and they’re going to say look we need to open that door over there, not you asking them will they open a window you know? So he said it’s all about winning control of the shop floor and he said that the way that that’s done is he said, that everything that people have that’s bothering them and that have a genuine basis, if they’re followed up, that’s how you get the support and that’s what we decided to do, that’s how I got involved in it, that’s what stuck with me, Geraghty’s thing about the shop floor.’(Interview 6, p.8).

Legitimacy.

This strategy of winning the hearts and minds of the workforce also has echoes in the community activism and in the work and development of the political activist as well as they sought to win the hearts and minds of their members and of the electorate. In terms of activism what denotes success. Is it the fact that you 'engage', is victory a pre-requisite or is it simply that the activist just gets on with it, doesn't accept the hegemonic line and seeks to campaign for those negatively affected by that dominant hegemonic ideology, inside and outside the workplace. It is pretty obvious that achieving success leads to empowerment but I would argue that the fact that an activist is willing to take on that dominant power effectively empowers the activist in the eyes of those they seek to represent. In what is labelled the era of empowerment the interviews show how this develops on the ground. This doesn't happen by accident and it takes a lot of hard work to establish the credibility required to gain a foothold in the dialogue and in turn to get the message out to the particular constituency that this organisation/group is open for business and capable.

'when I moved there...there were some people who had been radicalised...not by the republican movement but by the Vietnam war and things like that...I started discussions with them and set up a branch there... and then we spread out to other areas...I had a very active educational programme going through the various branches and...we kept the thing very much intact' (Interview 3, p.10)

This educational programme was also extended into the broader community through door to door surveys and a needs assessment of the area the results of which the organisation then based its campaigns on and one of the methods used was the production of a paper.

'...there were a few people I got into the branch and they were into traditional songs in a big way and oral history in a big way so we discussed producing a paper which would incorporate aspects of socialism and social history which was combined with the songs and with the oral history and...it was very much sought after and we kept that going for a good while and it helped influence...'
(p.11)

The activists empowerment is based in the community where the activist is rooted particularly when that community recognises the activist as someone who can get things done and people will approach the activist as someone they can trust to represent them in an honest manner and with their interest at heart.

‘I’ve often had people knocking on my door and I think one of the reasons is because of working in ---- and I’d have to put ground rules on when they’d come and explain to them I don’t work in that area but I’ll give you a number, only about two weeks ago I had another girl knocking on me door looking for support with her child because she said she thought the child was taking drugs, so I said to her look I said “what you do now” I said “is go up to the Millennium and contact _____” and she said to me she said “will you do it for me?” and I said “I don’t have his number” I said “because I lost my phone but what I will do is go with ya” and I said “I’ll bring ya up” I said “and I’ll introduce ya to _____ and then you can talk away” I’d be very clear on that’s it’s not my, em... I haven’t got the qualifications to deal in certain things and I’ll be very clear on that and they respect me for that but if there’s anything I can do, I’ll do it and I’d be very confidential like and I’d put them in whatever direction I think they need to go’ (Interview 1, pp.15-16)

Within this extract there are a number of elements at play in that the activist is recognised by the resident as someone to talk to, as someone to be trusted and as someone who will help find a solution to her problem. On the other hand the activist has become confident enough in her own ability to understand that she has limitations but is not fazed by this because she understands and empathises with her neighbour and her issue. She also has an understanding of her own limitations and far from being a weakness this is an actual testimony to her strength and to how she has developed as an activist. Her expertise lies not in what she knows but in knowing what to do and her ability to keep it private. A second source of power for the activist comes from the recognition of the activists abilities by the powers that be, as the union official pointed out to the shop steward on control of the floor the same applies in the community.

‘...when we got the action group up and running and we were coming back from Limerick on the bus and _____ the community sergeant was there at the time, city council officials were there and I could hear them talking, you know what I mean, Jesus how did they get it going , we thought they’d have to get in vigilantes and that. So _____ came up to me and asked me would I go down and sit with them for a minute? I will I said. So I went down with him. Will you tell the lads how you got it [action group] up and running and ye didn’t have to get in vigilantes ...sure I said, we knew all the kids from the time they were born, you knew their parents so you were either going to talk to them and the parents...’ (Interview 2. p.12)

In the above extract the activist is recognised by both outside forces and by insiders as someone who can get things done, as someone in control and the lessons of industry are transposed to the community space. However there are times when this recognition can be the reason for to fear the activist and it is often the case for vested interests to demonise the campaigner because of their expertise as this extract on inner city planning illustrates.

‘...anyone that was au fait with the arguments or anyone who heard the arguments from the residents and from the Trade Union’s point of view who supported the residents...couldn’t but in my view come down on the side of the residents...the local power elite just to denigrate the opposition to it said that these are the people that are responsible for the demise of Waterford... they blamed other people to hide their own failings. So from experience and looking back and reflecting on it ...what destroyed this city is not activists like us and community organisations but the third rate political and civic leadership that we have had over the years. For instance the News and Star (newspaper) is owned by the Crosbies and the News and Star were one of the main media outlets who came down on the residents and their backers in terms of an alternative vision...that was because they were operating out of a listed building that had been bought by the developer and my understanding there was a financial arrangement there but moreover they were going to get a front of house office in the complex as a quid pro quo and we put this to the oral hearings and it was not refuted but I have no direct evidence that that was the case’.(Interview 4, p. 26-27)

Commitment

What does commitment mean for an activist? How can it be measured? The experience of this community activist may help to explain what the concept can entail.

‘When you’re a community activist you are always going to have people who don’t want you doing it. No matter what you are doing you’re invading their space, like, and what do you do? You can’t stand back and watch your estate being brought to the ground again.’ (Interview 2, p.16).

This activist sought to defend his community from a developing criminal element who were trying with some success to establish a base for their activities within the community. They were adopting measures tried and tested by other criminal elements in other Irish cities and with the state apparatus seemingly powerless to act the community looks to its representatives to resolve the problem and in this instance the activists used their voice and contacts to raise the issue and give it the highest profile possible with the result that life was made difficult for the gang and they responded by petrol bombing one of the houses and in this interview the activist dealt with the trauma of the attack.

‘ There last year we had an awful lot of houses being burned out and I’ll tell you what it was over now, it was over [people] not being allocated houses so...I was at a meeting one night and there was three...two houses done around the corner and one of them had a foreign family moving in, and there was another family had been terrorised out of it and that was being done up by city council so one Thursday night anyway I was at a meeting with S. actually and we were talking about all that was going on, the drugs, the threats, the intimidation, houses being burned...I knew eventually...you’re always aware...you have a group within the community and you’re talking about stuff that shouldn’t be done well they don’t like that so they petrol bombed the house one Thursday night. I got the phone call... it was about twenty to ten...I was on my way home with Sean and if I hadn’t gone into the chipper to get a fish and chip I would have been here when it happened but I wasn’t and that broke my heart, she was sitting here on her own and she had just got up to make a cup of tea when she heard the bang...she thought the TV had exploded but she could see the flames so she ran out around the back and over the wall and she fell going over the wall and hurt her hand but an uncle of hers lives down here in the corner and there were a few young fellas down there and they looked and they’d seen what happened. Now they’re no saints but one of the young fellas ran up and jumped over the wall and kicked the petrol bomb away off the window and I was mad but I got great support off the neighbours there’s only three or four families that are trying to ruin the area and to be honest if you asked me why it happened I’d say to you that it is

because I'm a voice in the community and they don't want you standing up for the community'. (Interview 2, p.17)

But this will not and did not stop or silence the activist but it did lead to a period of serious reflection and consultation with family and colleagues. However loyalty to the community and an inner strength that both the activist and his partner have in abundance helped them decide not to be cowed, that this was their community and they and their neighbours had too many years invested in the estate to surrender it now.

'and I remember the Thursday night that it happened...we had to go down and stay with my daughter in_____, it's only five minutes down the road. But we were in the house the two of us, we were up in bed and I 'm married twenty seven years to the woman and I know her another thirteen years and it was the most frightening...I couldn't do anything for her...I wasn't there and you felt...you felt useless, you know what I mean, that happened when there was nobody there and I said it to her, I'm sorry I wasn't there, and look she said, whether you were there or not it's after happening, but she said I'm telling you, we're not moving out of our house for nobody, we're staying here and we made that decision.' (p.18)

The commitment of the activist to the cause is important to the organisation or group and without it there is no cohesion in actions, indeed in all probability there is no action but not all commitment needs to be as powerful as the foregoing commentary. There is also the cost in other ways that prevent participation. Sometimes there were systemic obstacles that blocked or stymied the activist despite the high level of commitment.

'...every time I stood (in the elections) I got thirty three percent of an increase the three times I stood I got thirty three percent of an increase... each time...you know...and one might say well you know...why did you...you know...resign... well 'twas like this...I was absolutely broke....I had taken on so much work that I'd a huge work load and I was trying to work and rear my family at the time and I became exhausted and absolutely broke financially.... and ahm... we tried to get somebody to take over from within the party but nobody was prepared to take the seat... finally after a long time....elapsed...I couldn't carry on...if I had carried on as I was at the time I'd be in the grave now. It was too much of a job to try and raise a family and handle the amount of cases that we were getting

ever... every day. Where ever I'd be working the phone in the house would start ringing straight away...'

Interviewer: 'But that was testimony as well to your ability and reputation and...'

'...that was the downside of it ...yeah..yeah...yeah...and you see if it had been in any of the major parties the money would have been there to...to support the campaign and of course they'd be delighted to do that but ah..it wasn't...it wasn't in our party'. (Interview 3, p.15)

Commitment is always a contested space for the activist in terms of personal input and in terms of opposing personal commitments. By this I mean outcomes can depend upon the level of commitment expended within and between those opposing forces the public and the private.

'Well in Waterford because of the campaigning that we did it was different, because of the urban areas it was different, it was carried but the rural Catholic vote and again this, you know they came out with dreadful stuff at the time, the amendment stuff and even campaigning took courage. I remember,... the photographs going back to '83, ... I was pregnant, ...1983 it was D., and you know I was the one... and we were the people out, handing out the leaflets in the city centre and standing there and saying "Vote No" to this amendment and all the liberal people coming along, aw you know you're great to be out there doing that, they wouldn't do that kind of, you know, nitty gritty kind of stuff, they wanted their liberal debate to be continued. So it was a them and an us thing kind of as well and it very much came down to that type of thing and even you would thoroughly disagree with the politics of these kind of people, you were together as a part of a campaign against the amendment. Because they carried weight, I mean these were influential people in their own right, they were doctors and solicitors and they were this and you know they were... Yeah and it was the same, it was the same then, I'm just thinking back right, I mean even women's movement at that time in 1983, was led by very middle class, in my view, women you had the odd exception of working class women but predominantly it was Fine Gael, middle class you had, you know you had Catherine Bulbulia, you had oh I can't remember some of the women ...Monica Barnes! All that liberal wing up of Fine Gael, they kind of dominated, then you had June Levine to an extent, a little, and you did certainly have Mary Holland and Mary Maher, the Irish Times, but they still represented to me at the time

quite a middle class view. Now they made very good arguments but it still didn't, wasn't what I was experiencing as a working class woman in the trade union movement, they were totally separate, I could agree with some of what they were saying. So they certainly did at that time you know take over take over the debate, so it wasn't, working class women didn't really have a voice (Interview 8, pp.12-13).

But it is also that commitment that changes things, that ensures the activist gets up and faces into the next campaign. The forces that reject progress are also committed and in this interview extract indicates why this activist, now in his seventies keeps campaigning despite the setbacks.

'we take the present economic situation of the country...and I'm involved now in this campaign against the household tax and we see now the terrible austerity that they've imposed and it is one that we can fight, the austerity with as much resistance as we can. I don't think we can win it but what we can do is expose the Government for what they're doing to people through that campaign, it isn't that we can win it because they have jumped ahead but we can expose them to the public, which we are doing. And people say look the country is in the state it's in so we have to do something, yes, we're in the state we're in but I'm not prepared to accept or to forget who put us in this mess...but they want us to forget who put us in this position and I'd be happy about paying certain things or to be paying a bit more than I am now if I thought that the people who put us in this position were put where they should be, in jail. And we weren't paying those huge pensions, the people who should be in jail instead of being in jail we are expected to pay them huge pensions, the bankers, the politicians and ..ah...with all the pressure on I don't see any move to end these structures where we give these ministers huge pensions, even after four years in a job they are entitled to a pension whereas other peoples pensions have been destroyed and they are prepared now to take the money out of your pension if you are an old age pensioner to pay for your house tax to pay for their fucking pensions...to put a bit of Irish into it... and keep them in their jobs. and I don't see any of the parties in there now...Fine Gael and Labour said look we have to get these fellas out of Government and now they're doing acts every bit as bad as Fianna Fail. The political structures that are there, the politics that are there are corrupt and always lived on corruption and beyond the voter, their influence is beyond the voter and they are the influences that move politics and not the influence of voters. (Interview 3, p.27)

These activists have not given up on campaigning by any manner of means but through all the interviews I found there is a sense of fatigue. Activism takes its toll on those involved.

They have explained how they have engaged in their various campaigns and it seems to me that there is an air of concern within their conversations with me. They all recognise the current need for action and most point to the need for leadership but it would be wrong to end on a sombre note so I will allow the activists voice to conclude the chapter on why they continue to do what they do, what sustains them in their activism.

‘I love the buzz of the area...because there’s always something to be done. I was at a meeting last Tuesday morning down with the city council and we have a park over here that’s not a park at all, it’s for the kids and there’s nothing in it and we put in a memorial garden for all the kids who died tragically down through the years but it’s not being maintained and to get something done with it is going to cost a hundred thousand but that’s an issue I’m going to take on now...not me on my own but with the Action Group.... I loved to see the horticultural stuff coming in, it’s in the development area and they are selling produce now and they hope to have a company up and running within three years. They are now selling to five or six restaurants who say the product lasts longer than the stuff they were buying in’. (Interview 2. p.27)

‘...things can happen in a short period of time...you know...things happen internationally ... like tree loggers in the Amazon in the South American jungle, you know Chico Mendes and characters like that and the people that went before him you get inspiration from that and you know you are carrying on the struggle...it’s a...it’s a lineage...and that’s how...that’s how you overcome the stuff...But the main thing for me was,...look, fuck... it you either go under and allow them to have victory or you try to give them sleepless nights.’(Interview 4. p.8)

‘I don’t know, it’s hard ... to be honest and I’m tired and my own wife _____ and she’s no mean activist, she’d be out, now she wouldn’t be at everything, she’ll go on campaigns and marches and she’s been to many a march in Dublin. She said to me one time...would you not give it up, you’ve been fighting all your life, you’re in your mid-fifties now, would you not just step back and let somebody else do it? And at times the sensible thing to do is to do that but I said to _____ ...I said because it’s in my blood. I can’t give you any other explanation for that, it’s just in my blood, I said when I see something, particularly around Ireland and even things on television, things I see around the world ... I see something that’s terrible or horrible and my blood rises and my heart starts to beat and I just say Jesus this is wrong like, it’s just the way I feel... (Interview 7. p.12)

Chapter 5

Conclusion.

At the outset of this research as I considered the role of the activist I recalled those who have been the ones I have most looked up to and I thought about what it was that set them apart from the rest of us mere mortals. There was their ability to lead and to persuade large meetings and small as to the direction we should be taking but they could also be persuaded of a better course if that was the case. I think from my interviews that these activists reflect many of these qualities. In summing up, this research has been a very small project and of course there are limitations to what I can claim from it. Nevertheless, I feel confident enough to say that within the participants there was a socialisation process that certainly encouraged them towards being sympathetic to social activism. I further believe that while those who were from families who had a connection, no matter how tenuous, to an organisation or political party were likely to get involved, it is also the case that those who were reared in disadvantaged circumstances have developed a fighting spirit that urges them to demand a better deal for today's young people.

I also found the participants feel that there needs to be a rethink on how we organise as campaigners. With the decline of Unions there is no longer a mass of workers in big locations waiting to be organised but as Participants from the community sector show there is work to be done in the communities where these workers live and it is there anyone who wants to build a movement should base themselves. There is also an anti politics attitude to varying degrees amongst all the participants reflecting perhaps the general populations current pique at anything political and maybe like Alinsky

they cannot accept rigid dogma or ideology. In terms of the future and the activist again all the activist's comment on unified opposition

With respect to the oral history aspect of the research I believe there is a story to be told by the many workers and activists like those that I interviewed particularly as much of it is about a disappearing world. It is hard to believe that the fact that a group of community activists carried on a five year campaign against water charges from nineteen eighty four to nineteen eighty nine doesn't merit being recorded. The women in the pro choice movement were the people who took an argument on the reproductive rights for women into the workplace and debated these issues amongst working women at a time when the vast majority of our political class were frozen in fright at the glare from the palaces of the bishops and it was a small band of twenty or so women who marched through Waterford to the bishops home to protest at his door over the treatment of the girl in the X case, isn't this an example of Federici's point on women having to fight an additional battle? When the oldest of the participants told me of the night he was to speak at a meeting in Kilkenny concerning the X case it is worth showing his welcome from the church in his own words,

'I remember going into Kilkenny city that night, a dark old foggy night, a gloomy night, and the bells were ringing in the churches to...to kind of...turn up the temperature against this debate, you know...and I said by Jesus Christ this is...this is an Ireland that I do not like...this is a horrible Ireland and the influence of the Church there to abuse it's influence like that instead of engaging in a proper debate and of course we won the...we won the campaign...which was a great thing...because the people had moved'. (Interview 3, p.18)

This man faced two lines of members of the Pro-Life movement attempting to intimidate him as he left the meeting but he held his head high because he believed in what he was doing. When the women held their weekly vigil against the Iraq war outside of city square shopping centre in Waterford and added a display of candles to represent the number of people who had died in the war they did it for about two years, week in, week out.

It is possible to take Eric Hobsbawm's comment in his essay *Homo Globatus* when he says, (2001), 'It seems to me today that ... the idea is gaining ground that these ancient motivations (solidarity and family bonds) are no longer important, that they can be discarded without any consequences. It is believed to be perfectly possible for a company's successes to coexist with permanent insecurity and a continuous turnover of employees' as the defining statement of where the worker is placed in to-days society. The hegemonic power of the concepts of globalisation and neo-liberalism allied with the capitalist's control of technology has placed the worker in this position and the lack of organisation and representation means the attack on gains of the last hundred years will continue and it is because of this attack that we as activists need to rethink our role. Our industry has gone and is not coming back anytime soon. Waterford city has become an industrial city without industry but it cannot become a city without activists. It would bode us well to remember these words of Fredrick Douglas (1857) when he said that

'Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress'.

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Appendix.1

Radical Social Activism in Waterford City

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide on your participation please take the time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study? This study is being undertaken as part of the requirement in fulfilling an MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism at the NUI Maynooth. The aim of the study is to examine Radical Social Activism in Waterford City during the period 1960 to date. The study will examine the role of the activist is prepared to make a stand on issues in which there is no personal gain.

Why have I been invited to take part? You have been invited to take part in this study because as an Activist the story of your experience in campaigning and subsequent activist knowledge gained is invaluable to the research and its successful outcome.

Do I have to take part? Taking part is entirely voluntary and it is up to you whether or not you take part. If you do take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, and, subsequently, you feel unable to continue, you are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

What happens if I take part? The study is based on lived experience and so you will be asked to take part in a short interview with the researcher. The interview should last between half an hour and forty five minutes. There are no risks to participation.

What are the benefits of participation? While there are no direct benefits from participation, your contribution will add to the discussion and understanding of Radical Social Activism. It will also leave an Activist voice on the record of the history of social activism.

Is the study confidential? All the research material collected will be held in accordance with the NUIM's policy on Academic Integrity. The data will be anonymised. A copy of the individual transcripts will be made available to participants before the final drafting of the dissertation.

Contact details. If you have any further queries about the research you can contact:

Researcher: Donie Fell (fellb@eircom.net, 0877831746 mob.) or Supervisor: Fergal Finnegan (fergal.finnegan@nuim.ie)

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Daniel Fell. I understand that the project is designed to collect and collate interviews from Activists and Campaigners involved in social activism in Waterford. I will be one of approximately 10- 15 people who will be interviewed for this study.

1. My participation is entirely voluntary. I understand that I may withdraw at any stage and that if I do withdraw it will be entirely confidential.
2. I understand that while the interview is designed towards discussion I may withdraw and conclude any aspect of the interview if I feel uncomfortable.
3. Participation involves an interview. Notes will be taken and an audio recording of the discussion will be made. I understand that if I don't wish to be taped I will not be able to participate in the project.
- 4.
5. The only people present at the interview will be the participant and the researcher.
6. I understand that this research has been approved by NUI Maynooth.
7. I have read and understand the information provided to me by the researcher. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily participate in this study.
8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

.....
Signature.

.....
Date.

.....
Name Block Capitals.

.....
Signature Researcher.

