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# Mole who infiltrated IRA attacks biopic

- Former agent McGartland says motives are distorted
- Two controversial films on Troubles debut at Cannes

**Henry McDonald and Charlotte Higgins in Cannes**

**Friday May 16, 2008**

[The Guardian](#)

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One of the most important agents to infiltrate the IRA has publicly distanced himself from a biopic of his life which is being marketed at this year's Cannes film festival.

Fifty Dead Men Walking, starring Sir Ben Kingsley as the mole's Royal Ulster Constabulary handler, is based on the autobiographical book of the same name by Martin McGartland. As "agent Carol", McGartland undermined the IRA in Belfast during the later years of the Troubles, foiling dozens of murders and bombings.

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The west Belfast man, who jumped through a bathroom window to escape his IRA interrogators after he was

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discovered, has told the Guardian the script "totally distorted" his story, and he plans to take legal action unless radical changes are made to the film before it is released.

A second controversial film based on the Troubles had its premiere at the festival yesterday. Steve McQueen's Hunger, which focuses on the death of Bobby Sands after 66 days without food, prompted both applause and walkouts as it opened the Un Certain Régard section.

McGartland, who had initially been delighted with the idea of turning his life into a film, said his principal objection was the way the script portrayed him as a disgruntled IRA member who breaks ranks to work as an RUC special branch agent for money. "That version of events is wholly untrue. I went into the IRA to infiltrate them. Prior to being recruited as a special branch agent I wasn't in the IRA, I wanted nothing to do with them, in truth I hated them."

He said his real motivation was revenge. "I did it because I saw my friends beaten up by the IRA," he said.

"The film company have told me this is only loosely based on my life but it's my life all the same. I was shot here in England by the IRA for what I did to the Belfast Brigade. My mother's house was attacked, my brother left for dead after a beating long after I was gone from Belfast and in hiding. They should have represented my story more accurately and fairly."

A spokesman for Future Films Limited, the company that co-financed Fifty Dead Men Walking, stressed that the movie was still in post-production and said McGartland had not seen it, so was not placed to make a final judgement.

He said McGartland may be shown the final cut before it is released. The film was shot last December in Northern Ireland.

The IRA unmasked McGartland as an informer in 1991 and came close to killing him after an interrogation at a flat in west Belfast. But the agent escaped by leaping out of a

bathroom window on the third or fourth floor of a block of flats. In 1999 the IRA tracked McGartland down to a coastal town in north-east England and two men shot him six times, but failed to kill him.

Turner prize winner Steve McQueen's *Hunger* is a violent and disturbing vision of life in the Maze prison during the second hunger strike of 1981, and is Britain's most prominent entry at Cannes.

Though the film is even-handed, following the lives of both inmates and guards, it will doubtless stir bitter memories.

It shows the pain and physical deterioration of Sands as he lost liver, pancreas, kidney and heart functions and his emaciated body became covered in sores. Actor Michael Fassbender, who plays Sands, went from 73kg (11st 6lbs) to 57kg (9st) over two months under medical supervision.

"The film obviously stems from politics," said McQueen, "but it is about people in an extreme situation on either side, both prisoners and prison officers. I am interested in what happens to people in those kind of conditions. It is about the smell, the atmosphere, the texture of those events; about the things between the words in history books."

Though he started work on the film before the outbreak of the Iraq war, he said the contemporary parallels had become unavoidable. "It is history repeating itself, in a sense. The body as a weapon for people who are not being heard."

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