



# Death of Derry Civil Rights veteran Eamon Melaugh

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The funeral of Eamon Melaugh, a highly respected Derry Civil Rights veteran, took place in the city yesterday (Wednesday), following his peaceful passing at home on Monday at the age of 92.

Requiem Mass was held at St Columba's Church, Long Tower, and he was interred afterwards in the City Cemetery.

Mr Melaugh was the beloved husband of Mary, late of Alexander House, loving father of Martin, Terance, Colm, Bernie, Kieran, Irene, Dermott, Deirdre, Aidan, Seamus and Ursula.

He was a cherished father-in-law, grandfather, great-grandfather and dear brother of Irene and the late Harry, Marie and Goretti.

Mr Melaugh was a founder member of the Derry Housing Action Committee, which campaigned for better housing conditions and provision in the city, in 1968. He was also active in the Derry Unemployed Action Committee, which called for employment and housing for Catholics here.

An active member of the Workers Party, Mr Melaugh and stood as a candidate for it and its predecessor, Republican Clubs / Official Sinn Féin, in the Foyle Constituency.

A prolific photographer, Mr Melaugh also founded the charity

Action With Effect which, for 19 years, worked with people in the poorest regions of India. The charity was officially wound up in December 2024.

In an interview with The Derry News in July 2022, Mr Melaugh reflected on Motorman in Derry in August 1972, and how the iconic Radio Free Derry was heard as far away as California in the United States.

He said: "We kept Derry people informed about what was happening in their communities during Motorman".

Mr Melaugh initially broadcast Radio Free Derry from his then home in Creggan's Circular Road. He later moved the "studio" to the Rossville flats.

He said: "A woman stopped me about a week after Operation Motorman and said her sister in California had been listening to me while I was on air.

"Radio Free Derry was a wee tin box. We operated out of the High Flats, up at the top. I laughed and said I didn't think our transmitter would have got Radio Free Derry as far as the United States.

"It turned out her sister had phoned from California to see what was happening in Derry, so she held the phone up to the radio and I was heard across the Atlantic. She listened to my voice.

"As I recall, Eamonn McCann got this heap of junk [broadcasting

equipment] and he gave it to me. I went up to the top of the High Flats. There was a room there where they stored water and I operated from there at the start of Operation Motorman. Radio Free Derry went on for about a week.

"There was no-one else prepared to go on the radio so I said I would do it. I could not see anything from the room I was in, but I had a couple of people running to me with updates about what was going on.

"They would come in and tell me what was happening," said Mr Melaugh.

Radio Free Derry broadcast music in between its news bulletins.

"We had an old wind up gramophone," he said. "I played the records which I would have had in the house; classical and semi-classical music.

"The first broadcast was done in Circular Road and I had to go out to a nearby field and hang the aerial up on the branches of the nearest tree. It was madness but it was a propaganda weapon, broadcasting to Derry and the diaspora as far away as California."

## DISASTER

Eamonn described Motorman as a disaster, both for the Derry people and for the British government.

Speaking to Mr Melaugh then, it was evident the horror of Bloody Sunday (January 30, 1972) had left a



**The late Eamon Melaugh.** (PHOTO: TOM HEANEY, NWPRESSPICS)

lasting impression on him and a clear appreciation of the degree of lethal force the British army would employ to achieve its aims come Motorman.

"I knew what the British army was capable of doing when it came onto the streets of Derry during Motorman," said Mr Melaugh.

"On Bloody Sunday it was sent in to try and frighten people off the streets and the way to do that was to murder."