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North of Ireland, the New IRA and the killing of Lyra McKee

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Lyra McKee

When Gerry Adams was an IRA commander in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast he used the riots that local young people conducted in defence of their area against the British army as an opportunity for spotting promising recruits to his unit writes Barney Cassidy. It's a fair guess that the New IRA leadership in Derry were doing the same thing when they allowed at least one of their members to open fire on the police during the clash in which they shot twenty-nine year old journalist, trade unionist and lesbian activist Lyra McKee.

Saoradh, the political organisation linked to the IRA, quickly issued a statement saying her death was an accident and extended its sympathy to her family. It offered no comment on the military wisdom of blindly firing a pistol in the general direction of the intended target and the organisation's technical incompetence is matched only by its political stupidity.

The Adams era riots of the early 1970s were part of a mass community defence against what was universally perceived as a hostile army of occupation. They had high levels of popular support. The Derry riot was the exact opposite. It was a demonstration of the New IRA's lack of support and political isolation. The police raided the house of one of the organisation's alleged supporters and didn't find anything. By way of contrast, the loyalist murder gangs are heavily involved in extortion, selling drugs and prostitution in the north of Ireland and operate with relative impunity. The fact that they are part of the DUP's election campaign machine offers them significant political protection.

To the extent that the New IRA has a strategy it is to launch an armed struggle for a united Ireland in a re-run of the one that ended in 1994. What'll be different this time around is that it will be conducted without any significant level of mass support, with fewer and less skilled activists, worse weaponry and near complete penetration by the state.

They are pinning their hopes on a hard Brexit [\[1\]](#).

"Brexit has the potential to break up the British state... with the inevitable infrastructure of a hard border imminent, this will drive home to the Irish people the partition of our country... and as history teaches us it will inevitably stoke the fires of resistance against British rule in Ireland."

It's an absurd plan. The killing of Lyra has cost them a lot of support in the communities in which they are active and many of its younger members must now be asking themselves if they really want

to spend twenty years in prison as the result of a futile gamble.

Nevertheless, the New IRA is tapping into reserves of frustration and despair. One of Lyra's most important articles was on the scourge of youth suicide in the north of Ireland [2]. She noted that more people committed suicide in the sixteen years after the Good Friday Agreement than died in the twenty-nine years of armed conflict. Creggan, the area in which Lyra died, is one of the poorest wards in the British state or Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement has created a gravy train for people close to Sinn Féin and the DUP but Derry's unemployed youth haven't been given tickets for it. A couple of days before the killing DUP leader Arlene Foster had called for a solid Protestant vote in the upcoming council elections [3]. The riots are an inarticulate howl of rage against the society they live in and it's virtually inevitable that some of them will be seduced by the rhetoric of a return to armed struggle.

Lyra's death was a tragedy for her family and those who loved her and there have been many public expressions of sympathy for her across Ireland. It's obvious to anyone watching them that there is no desire for a resumption of an armed struggle that failed last time and will fail again. The New IRA has set back the cause of Irish unity and strengthened the hand of those who support partition. Revolutionary changes happen when tens of thousands of ordinary people get involved in politics and killing an innocent woman with empty militarist macho gestures stops that from happening.

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P.S.

- Posted on 21st April 2019:
<http://socialistresistance.org/the-killing-of-lyra-mckee/16810>

Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-44082633>
- [2] <https://mosaicscience.com/story/conflict-suicide-northern-ireland/>
- [3] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/local-elections-2019/split-unionist-vote-would-bolster-sfs-border-poll-demands-says-foster-as-dup-launches-manifesto-38030199.html>