

Northern Ireland locked down for G8 summit

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An immense security operation around the June 17 to June 18 visit by the G8 group of world leaders will place much of Ireland, north and south, under police lockdown.

Although the operation is centred on the isolated Lough Erne golfing resort, in Fermanagh, near Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, its impact is being felt across the entire island. The British, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland governments all aim to prove that Northern Ireland is open for investment and that they can organise the police and military resources to deal with large-scale protests from the working population. The summit, announced by Prime Minister David Cameron last November as part of the current British presidency of the G8, is also being used to trial police state measures.

Around 8,000 police from Northern Ireland, along with 3,600 drafted in from Britain will be available to protect the Lough Erne resort from protestors. British police have been undergoing water cannon and riot training to bring their skills into line with those of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Northern Ireland secretary of state Theresa Villiers announced that in addition to British Army helicopters being used to ferry the visiting dignitaries from Belfast International Airport to the resort, “standard military aid to civil authorities” would be provided to the PSNI. Villiers also approved the use of private security operator G4S to provide an additional 450 security staff. The Irish government has assigned more than 900 police to the border region for the duration of the summit.

The Lough Erne resort is being surrounded by 8 kilometres of steel fencing, while many of the surrounding roads are subject to diversions, delays and numerous police checkpoints. New closed-circuit TV towers have sprung up everywhere around the venue. Much of the lough itself is being closed to water-based

traffic. The PSNI has imported speed boats used to police the Thames for the London 2012 Olympics to patrol waters usually frequented only by anglers. Villiers has authorised the Northern Ireland Department of Justice to seize land near Enniskillen until July 15 for the “preservation of the peace of the maintenance of order”.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board has authorised the PSNI to purchase at least two aerial surveillance drones. This is explicitly not just for the G8 summit. The policing board intends to review the “technical operation of the systems and their effectiveness; the value for money aspect; and legal compliance” after one year of operations. Surveillance drones have been in evaluation use with UK police forces for a number of years.

In another security innovation, under the pretext of stopping mobile phones being used to trigger bombs, the Irish government is rushing through legislation to give the police authorities the right to order telecom companies to shut down mobile phone networks.

As is the global norm, official propaganda presents the enormous security measures as defending the G8 leaders from terrorist attack while allowing for “legitimate” protest. Northern Ireland, particularly the border region, has long been a centre for republican dissidents opposed to the “peace process” through which Sinn Fein disbanded the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and joined the British government.

However, in their recent years of operation, the few hundred republican dissidents have been unable to launch a single major military operation and are subject to continual police and security service infiltration, surveillance and court actions. Over the last months, the dissidents have been the targeted for particularly intense repression. PSNI chief Matt Baggott recently boasted that his service was arresting a dissident “every week”. Sinn Fein currently sits in government in

Northern Ireland and is a full participant in supporting and carrying through all the G8 security measures. Sinn Féin members sit on the policing board that approved the introduction of surveillance drones.

Right-wing loyalist flag protests, opposed to the British Union flag being alternated with that of the Republic of Ireland at Belfast and other city halls, have also been subject to extraordinary anti-democratic measures. Earlier this year, flag protestors Jamie Bryson and Willie Frazer were arrested and held on remand for alleged public order offences that appeared to solely relate to their professed opinions. The protests themselves, which carried on for months prior to the announcement of the summit, have subsequently all but died out.

This has not stopped the police authorities from presenting all protesters against the G8 as somehow entangled with the republican dissidents or hard-line loyalists. In March, Assistant Chief Constable Alistair Finlay complained that he was “aware of a range of groups who either jointly or individually might want to come together to cause some disruption”.

In April, PSNI chief superintendent Pauline Shields declared that G8 protestors might use “acid and other substances such as paint and petrol bombs”.

In practice, the central focus of the security clampdown is to ensure that the immense class divisions in Ireland, north and south, do not, now or in the future, find expression in protests that overwhelm the security forces. The G8 leaders speak for the same financial oligarchy currently wreaking social devastation across much of Europe and the world.

The Republic of Ireland has seen particularly sharp attacks on all areas of social spending since the outset of the financial crisis while €65 billion has been transferred to the country’s banking system. The Northern Ireland government is imposing public spending cuts in line with the rest of Britain.

Great frustration over the unending series of intense social attacks is building up among broad layers of the working population. This can find no expression in the political setup either side of the Irish partition, in which all the political parties and trade unions are fully complicit in the imposition of austerity measures. This is why the authorities are using every opportunity to intimidate would-be protesters and make clear that they intend to make large numbers of arrests.

As many as 300 additional police cells have been made available in Maghaberry and Magilligan prisons and in the Hydebank Wood young offenders and female prison. Given that the Parade’s Commission, which has to approve all parades and demonstrations in Northern Ireland, has signed off on a march of 3,000 from Enniskillen on June 17, the cell allocation amounts to an intention to arrest 10 percent of those demonstrating. A former British Army barracks near Coleshill has also been reserved to use as a temporary holding pen. Two other former army bases have been reopened as support facilities.

British and Irish police have been liaising with police authorities across Europe to ensure that those deemed “likely troublemakers” are watched from the moment of their arrival in Dublin, Shannon or Belfast airports. The Belfast-based Committee on the Administration of Justice warned that plastic bullets have been used on 12 occasions this year alone in Northern Ireland.



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