

Young journalist Lyra McKee shot dead in Northern Ireland

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Lyra McKee, a 29-year-old journalist, was shot dead Thursday night during a confrontation between rioters and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in Derry.

She is the first journalist to have been killed in Northern Ireland since the murder in 2001 of Martin O'Hagan by loyalist killers.

McKee was killed in the aftermath of a police raid on a house in the Creggan estate. The raid was directed against the republican dissident New Irish Republican Army (NIRA), in the aftermath of public statements by MI5 that the group was suspected of planning actions marking the anniversary of the Easter Uprising against British imperialist rule in 1916.

The PSNI operation, in a Catholic working-class estate that has suffered frequent acts of police repression and intimidation, provoked a standoff between the police and local youth. Cars were set on fire and bricks and petrol bombs were thrown at PSNI vehicles.

At around 11.00pm, shots were fired in the general direction of the police vehicles. Videos on social media show crowds of young people milling around, then shots, followed by shocked screams of a woman standing beside McKee near police vehicles.

McKee was hit in the head. After being rushed to hospital she died.

The PSNI announced over the weekend that two teenagers, aged 18 and 19, were arrested under the Terrorism Act, but both were later released without charge.

A statement from dissident political group, Saoradh [Liberation], described the killing of McKee as accidentally carried out by "a Republican Volunteer attempting to defend people from the PSNI/RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary]."

McKee's death generated widespread public disgust, with thousands attending vigils and remembrances in Derry—including a large gathering in Creggan itself which

attracted support from across the city as well as Belfast, Dungannon, Omagh and Newry.

The NIRA has very limited support among some oppressed youth in the Creggan and similar estates, but there is little broader sympathy for its atavistic calls for a return to the armed struggle for Irish independence.

The group emerged in 2012 following the merger of several small republican groups and former members of the Provisional IRA opposed to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Saoradh was founded in 2016. According to its constitution, it aims to "effect an end to Britain's illegal occupation of the six counties" and establish a 32-county socialist republic. While denying that it is the political wing of the New IRA, Saoradh functions as a mouthpiece for the group.

Despite the rhetoric, the dissident groups have absolutely nothing to do with socialism. Over the years their activities have amounted to a succession of shootings and bombings—most notoriously the car bombing of Omagh in August 1998—attributed to its forerunner, the Real IRA.

The worst terrorist atrocity of the Troubles led to the loss of 28 lives, including nine children, 13 women (one of whom was pregnant) and six men. The World Socialist Web Site explained the bankrupt political agenda of the dissident republicans of forcing a resumption of hostilities to galvanise "the masses" into a struggle for Irish independence:

"After 30 years, Sinn Féin and the IRA have proved incapable of securing the basic social interests of working-class Catholics and were no nearer to achieving their stated goal of a united Ireland... The massive endorsement of the Northern Ireland Agreement in the referendums on May 22 amongst Catholics expressed this widespread disillusionment with the traditional politics of nationalism."

However, we insisted, "The considerations shaping the

Agreement were exclusively those of the ruling class. In order to develop Ireland as an investment location for the global corporations seeking access to Europe, it was necessary to bring military conflict to an end and to develop cross-border trade and investment with the South. All of this was stated openly. What remained unsaid by any of the participants in the peace talks is that attracting international capital requires the destruction of the extensive social welfare provisions and the systematic lowering of wages and conditions.

“To this end the unionist and republican parties have been given a joint veto over all policy-making in the new Northern Ireland Assembly. This provides them with a virtual state-enforced monopoly on political life, designed to counteract any movement of workers against big business that cuts across the sectarian divide.”

Two decades later, Northern Ireland’s “power sharing” administration, now made up of Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party, has been unable to function for two-and-a-half years even as the social conditions facing Catholic and Protestant workers continue to deteriorate.

One aspect of Lyra McKee’s work was on the enduring impact of the Troubles on the generation of young people who grew up after the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

Derry, with a metro population of over 230,000, is the second largest city in Northern Ireland and one of the poorest areas in the UK. A 2017 survey of young people found that 95 percent saw no future for themselves in the city. Nearly 40 percent said they planned to leave because of poor job opportunities.

Last year, McKee commented on reports that the 20 years of post-agreement “peace” had seen 4,500 people kill themselves, substantially more than the entire number of deaths by violence during the Troubles. Northern Ireland’s rate of mental health problems is 25 percent higher than England.

Meanwhile, the New IRA continues to carry out occasional paramilitary actions and to advance a perspective that have no popular support. Earlier this year, a car bomb exploded outside Derry court for which the New IRA were thought to be responsible. The bomb narrowly missed killing or maiming a group of passers-by, while hundreds had to be evacuated from nearby hotels and clubs.

The death of McKee will inevitably be used to strengthen the hand of Sinn Fein and the DUP in efforts to restore the functioning of the devolved government. Sinn

Fein’s Vice President Michelle O’Neill called on the NIRA to “pack up” at the weekend. She and DUP leader Arlene Foster released a joint statement condemning Ms McKee’s killing as a “heinous crime” and “an attack on the democratic process.”

It will also inevitably be employed to step up state repression. Areas such as Creggan were historically the target of frequent raids by the British Army during the decades of the “Troubles”, which remains the source of immense unresolved tensions.

Only last week, it was reported that a former British Army soldier, known as “Soldier B”, is to face charges for the death of 15-year-old Daniel Hegarty who was murdered by the British Army in July 1972. Hegarty was shot in the head twice. The killing took place during Operation Motorman, which mobilised 22,000 regular and 5,300 part-time soldiers in a huge operation to retake so-called “no go” areas, set up in working class nationalist areas. Operation Motorman was then the largest British military operation since the 1956 Suez Crisis.

Daniel and two of his cousins, both of whom were also shot and wounded, wanted to watch the British Army tanks deployed to smash into the “no go” areas. The soldiers who attacked them hid behind a garden fence.

The prosecution follows the equally belated decision to prosecute “Soldier F” for his role during Bloody Sunday, six months before Operation Motorman. “Soldier B” will undoubtedly be offered the same level of defence as “Soldier F”, to whom British Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson proposed “full legal and pastoral support.”

The only answer for the working class is a political struggle to unify its collective forces throughout Ireland across the sectarian divisions cultivated by imperialism in a struggle for socialism.



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