

## 1819 1919 2019 - Remembering Lives Lost in the Aftermath of War

### Address Part Two

And now we move on a hundred years again. It is April 2019. Spring has sprung. We are in the garden enjoying an early hint of summer. My wife reads to me a letter written by a 24-year-old journalist to her 14-year-old self. It brings a tear to my eye. The name of the journalist is Lyra McKee. Five years later, in April this year, she was dead. You may well know the story. Wikipedia has a factual description: “On 18 April 2019, McKee was shot during rioting in the Creggan area of Derry, Northern Ireland. Violence broke out after police raids on dissidents with the aim of seizing munitions ahead of the Easter Rising commemorative parades due to take place in the area that weekend. The disturbances were centred on Fanad Drive. Youths threw petrol bombs and burnt two vehicles. Police said that a gunman then fired up to twelve shots towards police officers. McKee, who was on Fanad Drive and standing near an armoured police Land Rover, was wounded in the head. Mobile phone footage and police CCTV footage shows a masked gunman, believed to be a member of the New IRA, opening fire with a handgun. McKee was taken by police, in an armoured Land Rover, to Altnagelvin Area Hospital, where she later died. Police blamed dissident republicans for her death.”<sup>1</sup>

in 2016 Lyra wrote an essay about young people in Northern Ireland that turned out to be poignant and prophetic. “We were the Good Friday agreement generation, destined to never witness the horrors of war but to reap the spoils of peace,” she wrote. “The spoils just never seemed to reach us.” She died on the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Good Friday agreement.<sup>2</sup>

Rory Carroll, in the Guardian, sets a context. “McKee could just as well have been writing about her killer. If there is a corner of Northern Ireland that has yet to reap crumbs from the peace, it is the Creggan. A housing estate that sprawls over a hillside outside Derry’s medieval walls, its name means stony place, an apt description of one of the most deprived areas in the United Kingdom. Here almost two-thirds of children are born into poverty. Many grow up angry and alienated – fertile soil for dissident republicans. “They’ve no hope. They get sucked into paramilitarism, they get chucked into crap,” said Sharon McCloskey, 49, part of a crowd of residents gathered on Fanad Drive, where McKee was shot. It is no coincidence that the New IRA, which emerged in 2012 via a merger of dissident groups opposed to the peace process, gained a foothold in Derry. Derry, Northern Ireland’s second city, is still awaiting the dividend – the “spoils”, as McKee put it.

“That paragraph Lyra wrote is just so apt,” said Kathleen Bradley, 38, a community activist and friend of the writer. “The dividend of peace should have reached down. It didn’t.” The statistics are sobering. Despite some excellent schools and a vibrant cultural scene, Derry ranked last in a 2017 Pricewaterhouse report on the economic health of 57 UK cities.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyra\\_McKee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyra_McKee)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/apr/20/poverry-paramilitaries-derry-fertile-soil-revolt-killing-lyra-mckee>

Poverty is not a justification for violence. But it can provide a breeding ground.

So, over these varied and terrible stories of death in the aftermath of war, what can we learn? Anything sounds glib. We have seen terrible violence against people who are not themselves in armed conflict. The violence has come both from the authorities and the downtrodden. It can have its roots variously in fear, prejudice, privilege and for many an absence of sources of hope.

My father was born in 1902. He was a teenager in London the aftermath of the Great War. He would recall for us the incessant violence meted out towards Germans – in practice, anyone who looked or whose name sounded foreign. It gave him a lifelong fear for the power of ‘the mob’ as he called it. People being stirred up to do nasty things. I have to say the press was no help with the masthead of the Daily Mail in those years carrying the daily message: “Hang the Kaiser. Make the Germans pay”.

Violence is a natural response of those who have been wronged. And I believe there are times when it can be justified. But they are rare. There is solid evidence that non-violent attempts to right wrongs can have a greater prospect of success. Research by Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at Harvard University, suggests that civil disobedience is not only the moral choice; it is also the most powerful way of shaping world politics. Looking at hundreds of campaigns over the last century, Chenoweth found that nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to achieve their goals as violent campaigns. And although the exact dynamics will depend on many factors, she has shown it takes around 3.5% of the population actively participating in the protests to ensure serious political change.<sup>3</sup> Chenoweth’s influence can be seen in the recent Extinction Rebellion protests, whose founders say they have been directly inspired by her findings. So just how did she come to these conclusions? When she first began her research in the mid-2000s, she was initially rather cynical of the idea that nonviolent actions could be more powerful than armed conflict in most situations. Working with fellow researcher Maria Stephan, Chenoweth performed an extensive review of the literature on civil resistance and social movements from 1900 to 2006. By the end of this process, they had collected data from 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns. And their results were striking. Overall, nonviolent campaigns were twice as likely to succeed as violent campaigns: they led to political change 53% of the time compared to 26% for the violent protests. This was partly the result of strength in numbers. Chenoweth argues that nonviolent campaigns are more likely to succeed because they can recruit many more participants from a much broader demographic, which can cause severe disruption that paralyses normal urban life and the functioning of society. Once around 3.5% of the whole population has begun to participate actively, success appears to be inevitable. “There weren’t any campaigns that had failed after they had achieved 3.5% participation during a peak event,” says Chenoweth. As John Lennon and Yoko Ono put in 1969: “All we are saying... is Give Peace a Chance”. As our next hymn puts it: “When human hearts are aching, may true human love be known”. In your Purple hymn book, its Hymn number 26: “Dancing sweet heart.”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190513-it-only-takes-35-of-people-to-change-the-world?fbclid=IwAR2R1CpLq80tfCxBdoYtIKj2friPGXkl6onpGDx-1KmlwyQyCnB6J9wIXM>