

COUNTS ON McENTEE



AUGUST 2023

In Temple Bar in the south inner city, three male tourists in their 20s are assaulted and suffer broken noses and one a fractured eye socket. In another incident, a man is set upon by youths with a golf club at Market Street in Dublin 8. A video of the attack is posted on social media.

In a third incident, a man in his 30s is stabbed on Grafton Street at 9am in the morning. A building earmarked to house asylum seekers is set on fire after being targeted by anti-immigration protesters who throw rocks through the window.

SEPTEMBER 2023

Gallows with effigies of politicians are set up outside Leinster House. TDs and senators

require Garda escorts to leave the building following the physical harassment of Michael Healy-Rae and his assistant earlier in the day. Thirteen people are arrested for public order offences.

NOVEMBER 2023

A woman in her 60s is stabbed in an unprovoked attack at Chatham Street at 9.30pm on Thursday, November 16. Separately, far-right protesters gather outside Leinster House and threaten violence.

Then, on Thursday night, 'unprecedented' riots follow the stabbing of three children and one of their adult carers outside their school in the city centre. Politicians tell the Mail they don't feel safe walking into Leinster House and that 'things have changed'.

TD. 'The problem, however, is not that money hasn't been made available by the Government – it has. But we're finding it extremely difficult to recruit people into the force.'

Last night the Taoiseach and Cabinet ministers met to discuss the response to the riots.

A Cabinet source said last night's meeting was a 'fact-based one' and that there 'was no politicking' over the issue.

They said Ms McEntee should not be undermined at the present time due to the serious issues with which she has to deal.

They also said a wider response to the events of Thursday night is being prepared.

Meanwhile, gardaí used their batons on numerous occasions last night during sporadic incidents of civil unrest in Dublin city centre.

Hundreds of frontline gardaí and members of the Public Order

Unit were on standby throughout the capital last night.

Clusters of youths and gangs of young men loitered around the streets. However, their numbers were smaller compared to those on Thursday night.

On O'Connell Street at approximately 7.30pm, several men and a woman clashed with gardaí before they were arrested.

Locals said that they had attempted to store large metal bars in the McDonald's restaurant nearby.

Video footage showed several gardaí using their batons to restrain the individuals before they were handcuffed and put into Garda vans.

As the evening progressed, fewer groups of hooded gangs were seen walking around. However, gardaí remained alert, maintaining a strong presence throughout the city.

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THE sounds of sirens were still wailing through Dublin's north inner city, more than 24 hours after a man wielding a long knife attacked and stabbed three small children and a woman outside a Gaelscoil on Parnell Square.

We're used to sirens here, with the Mater and Rotunda hospitals, Phibsborough fire station, Mountjoy jail, and two large Garda stations; it's a familiar noise that after a while fades into the back of your consciousness.

But it's difficult to ignore them now. After the shameful riots up and down the city's main thoroughfare on Thursday night, where shops were looted, buses, Garda cars and a Luas tram set on fire, and gardaí attacked by baying mobs, there's a nervousness that it could erupt again.

Our son's primary school contacted us to say they were happy for the children to be collected early, that other schools and creches in the area closed because of unconfirmed reports there could be some repeats of the unrest.

It's an understandable precautionary measure, but serves as another reminder about who has been left most traumatised by the incidents over the last couple of days – the children.

All those little girls and boys sitting in classrooms, hearing the commotion outside: the screaming, the fear, the anger. Followed by ambulances and Garda cars screeching to halt outside their school building. Terrified parents waiting for them outside, hugging them close, trying to figure out how much to tell them about what had just happened.

And then to see the aftermath. First of all incensed locals, gathering at cordons, shouting abuse at gardaí, accusing them of not doing their job, of being useless and protecting the ones that do the harm. Hours later, lawless thugs taking the opportunity to cause chaos. 'Christmas has come early lads,' they crowed on social media.

We've seen them before. I watched them up close, last January in Ballymun, marching or cycling alongside local people protesting against refugee accommodation centres in their area. All of them young men or teenage boys, dressed in black and dark greys, hopped up with excitement at the anticipation of causing some aggro.

They openly taunted the gardaí, and any motorists who dared try to break their pickets had their cars walloped.

Other locals told me how they recognised some of these hoodlums as regular drug dealers in Ballymun. 'They say they're marching to keep women and children safe,' one life-long resident said. 'But it's OK to sell these same people drugs, get them addicted, kill some of them? These are just bad people, taking advantage of a situation.'

It was the same on Thursday. Thugs descending on O'Connell Street, intent on causing carnage. The same kind of people who beat up American tourist Stephen Termini on Talbot Street during the summer, just a stone's throw away from O'Connell Street.

We were told back then by Justice Minister Helen McEntee that the streets of our capital city were safe. 'But we do, like any other city, have problems that we need to try

We're used to sirens in the city but now the mood is fearful



Jenny Friel

and address,' she added.

We certainly do, but it seems that the State is intent on blaming the far right for this sickening outburst of lawlessness.

There is evidence that social media postings by certain agitators helped to spark the disorder. But our public order issues aren't the result of a small group of right-wing nutjobs sending out a call to arms.

It goes so much deeper than that. We have a law-and-order problem that has been allowed to escalate to the point where certain sections of our society feel no fear.

They don't worry about conse-

quences; they know our Garda force has limited powers, that they have to be careful how they tackle criminals for fear of breaking the law themselves.

And often our legal system fails to address their crimes in any kind of credible manner, while our jails are overcrowded, with prisoners being regularly released early to try to alleviate the pressure.

And has the spirit of An Garda Síochána ever been this broken? Just weeks ago, the Garda Representative Association (GRA), which represents rank-and-file officers, overwhelmingly voted no confidence in their most senior

officer, Commissioner Drew Harris. An extraordinary 98.7% of them voted against him.

Last month we learned that a record number of gardaí have left the force, 107 of them in 2022 and 116 so far this year. The GRA predicts at least 150 will have resigned by the end of December.

After interviewing 20% of those officers who quit in the previous 18 months, the GRA issued its findings. 'They have described a worrying work culture where bullying, mental stress and burnout, and a sense of vulnerability are rife,' a spokesperson said.

'They have described feeling undervalued and overworked, and overwhelmingly describe morale as being at an all-time low within the Garda organisation.'

To watch online videos of lone gardaí fending off attacks from a crazed mob on Thursday night, you can only imagine how much lower that morale is right now.

Indeed, the mood of many people in Dublin right now is on the floor. To witness a city lose control like that, and for there to be genuine fear that it could happen again, and for there to be no sign of understanding at Government level, or indeed from Garda management, that this is a problem that was allowed to fester before it exploded, is a truly worrying affair. But today, it's the families who sent their children off to creche and school on Thursday morning, and who for a short time feared the very worst, for whom we should reserve most of our angst. And for the parents of those two young girls and little boy who were stabbed, one of whom is still critical. Not forgetting the injured creche lady, who stepped in to try and save them.

It's a trauma that is unlikely to heal any time soon.

Has Garda spirit ever been this broken?