

The Irish right-wing extremists getting ready for violence

Conor Gallagher
Security and Crime Correspondent

Neo-Nazi network with cells in US and Europe holds virtual meetings to attract members in Ireland

Last month, a group of right-wing extremists, from Ireland, the US and continental Europe gathered online for a three-hour discussion on how to stop immigration into Ireland, by force or otherwise.

These virtual meetings have become an almost daily ritual for the disparate group. Sometimes the meetings attract dozens of attendees but the conversation is usually dominated by a handful of voices.

One of those voices belongs to the organiser of the meetings, a Tipperary man aged in his late 20s. During the meet on June 18th, he had a dark warning for the others.

"It's going to be a power struggle," he said. "We're just going to have to break them down. We're quickly running out of time."

The conversation turned to a familiar topic, the justification of using violence to stop immigration. The Tipperary man made his views clear: "We need some acceleration. They're messing with forces they don't even understand."

One of the Americans remembered an article he read about people burying pigs on a site in Europe to stop a mosque being built there. Maybe something similar would work for asylum seeker sites in Ireland, he wondered.

The Tipperary man became excited. "It's a great idea," he said before suggesting putting

work has cells across American and Europe. Rundo, who is currently in US custody on federal conspiracy and rioting charges, intended these active clubs to be a network of decentralised cells, meaning they will continue even if the leadership is arrested.

The movement, sometimes dubbed White Nationalism 3.0, evolved directly from Rundo's previous organisation, the Rise Above Movement, which has been described as a sort of neo-Nazi "fight club".

Like its predecessor, the Active Club movement mixes extreme right-wing positions with a focus on masculinity and physical fitness, particularly mixed martial arts. Evidence of this can be seen in the social media postings of CnG.

The group frequently posts photographs of its members engaged in combat sports training. Great care is taken to blur faces and other identifying marks. In some cases, participants' footwear is even blurred to conceal their identities.

Considered moderates
Members of the group have shown up at several anti-immigrant protests, including in Coolock last March. However, they hold a deep contempt for many of their fellow anti-immigration activists, such as Gavin Pepper and Hermann Kelly, whom they consider moderates.

CnG does not just want a dramatic reduction in immigration, it wants mass deportations, according to an associate of the group who spoke with The Irish Times.

"Are you going to roll over and die, Gaelic man?" it says in one post appealing for members. "Nationalism is only as credible as the men who speak about it. If you can't fight, learn," another reads. In another post, a member compares CnG to the IRA of the 1920s and the Troubles.

It has close links with other

These plans did not sit well with other National Party leaders, who saw growing concerns about immigration as an opportunity to appeal to mainstream voters. Uniformed protection squads were unlikely to help the party shed its extremist image. Barrett was forced out, although he still claims to be leader of the National Party, and his association with CnG came to an end.

Instead, he turned his focus to establishing another group, called Clann Éireann. "Retreat has failed! Democracy has failed! No more will we negotiate our existence with our intractable enemies, nor accept the rules they use to bind us," Barrett posted on the new group's website last year, while stressing Clann Éireann was "in no way a political party".

At the same time, the Clann Éireann members began plastering lamp-posts across Dublin with stickers depicting a masked paramilitary and Clann Éireann's swastika-like logo, while Barrett took to openly praising Hitler and wearing military-style uniforms.

Barrett did not respond to requests for comment, but he expanded on his new group last month in an interview with the podcast of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), a large Swedish neo-Nazi organisation which has carried out violent attacks against politicians and journalists.

The US State Department recently designated the NRM a terrorist organisation, citing its efforts to acquire weapons and explosives and its involvement in training in hand-to-hand combat.

'Ideological vanguard'

Barrett told his interviewer that Clann Éireann is intended to be an "ideological vanguard" to spread "social and national ideas". It will include a "uniformed security wing" called Sciath Náisiúnta to protect its members "from violent assault by the reds", he said.

"In terms of violence, in self-defence terms, it's whatever is necessary. But we're certainly not going to be relying on the police."

Gardaí responsible for monitoring extremist activity are aware of both CnG and Clann Éireann. However, they are of the view that they currently pose little threat and that their membership remains small.

Barrett's organisation comprises less than 20 members, including his wife, according to one source.

Of far greater concern for authorities are the less organised groups who have been increasingly targeting immigrants with violence in recent months. "These are people who are not a member of a party or group but might share information and plans. They don't have much of an ideology to speak of, except that they hate foreigners and want to do them harm," said a security source.

In particular, gardaí are concerned about the growing number of violent attacks on asylum seekers which are being filmed and uploaded to social media, before being shared in the far-right online ecosystem.

Almost a dozen such videos have gone viral in recent months. In most cases, the footage was accompanied by claims that the assault victim had been caught engaging in a crime of some sort, usually involving a perceived threat to children.

"In most if not all cases, there was absolutely nothing to support that they were a threat to anyone, including children," said a senior garda.

Frequent target

The severe shortage of accommodation for asylum seekers has also created a new danger. Makeshift camps set up by homeless asylum seekers have become a frequent target of attacks or intimidation.

On Tuesday, as gardaí attempted to quell anti-immigration violence in Coolock, a group of asylum seekers who had set up tents in Phibsborough were targeted by masked men, including one brandishing a hurley.

Gardaí moved the aggressors on, and the asylum seekers were relocated to various other locations. By Wednesday, some had set up camp on City Quay in the city centre.

That night, a group of men armed with knives and iron bars attacked the camp. The tents were slashed and thrown into the water and their occupants were forced to flee to Pearse Street Garda station for safety.

Gardaí say they are investigating the matter as a case of criminal damage. No arrests have been made.



Deprivation and lack of consultation at the heart of Coolock's anger



Kitty Holland
Social Affairs Correspondent

Youth workers express concern over effect of recent riots on young people in Darndale and Coolock

Last Wednesday afternoon, following two days of serious unrest and dozens of arrests at a nearby site earmarked for asylum seekers, teenage boys sitting on a low wall in the Belcamp area of Darndale watched curiously as The Irish Times approached.

A woman in the doorway of the adjacent house nods a greeting, looking on as reporter and photographer explain who we are – that we're asking young people their thoughts on the disturbances at the former paint factory on the Malahide Road.

Riots, which erupted following the clearance of a camp established four months ago to protest plans to accommodate 500 asylum seekers there, included a digger being set alight, petrol bombs thrown, pepper spray used on rioters, and deployment of the Garda Public Order Unit.

One boy aged about 15 gets to his feet with a smile, saying: "No, [he] wasn't there... F**k that – you'd end up getting arrested" – but he saw it all on TikTok. "Madness, wasn't it? Like world war three."

Suddenly, he stops. "Hold on. Hold on a minute. Yiz aren't coppers, are yiz?" Others stand too, zipping their jumpers up around their faces, pulling hoods over their heads. One walks away. "You're not videoing this?" asks another.

Despite reassurances that we are neither filming nor recording, and are not gardaí, they are clearly nervous. They don't engage further. One gestures towards some older men across a rubbish-strewn green, past two boarded-up houses, saying: "I think they were at the protests."

Permanent surveillance
Around the neighbourhood are 8m-high poles topped with CCTV cameras: a constant reminder that the vast area, which also includes well-kept greens and baskets of pink flowers hanging from lamp-posts – is under permanent surveillance.

Less than 3km away, at the entrance to the disputed site, are more young people. Two teenage girls sit on camping

chairs looking at phones among about a dozen people maintaining a "picket".

One, an elderly man, is happy to talk to a journalist. He will protest for an hour before going for his shopping, he says. "I am past my sell-by date now, but I have a grandson and he is living in his partner's family house, in a log cabin. He has two children. He is saving hard to get a house. 'I'm here for them. There's people coming into the country being handed everything, everything. Where is the fair system?'"

Watching our conversation is former local election candidate Kevin Coyle. He interrupts, saying that a question on the housing crisis "can't" be put to the man. He calls our correspondent a "snake, two-faced c**t" adding derogatory terms for The Irish Times. "Everybody hates you around the country," he says. "The same with the people in Coolock."

He is then joined by a woman directing The Irish Times to "leave" the public path. "Yiz are getting nothing," says Mr Coyle. The interaction is filmed by one of those present.

Whether present or not at the recent disturbances, the children and young people of Coolock and Darndale can witness every frame, including disturbing violence, on social media.

"We're extremely concerned [about the impact on children and young people]," says Ashley White, communications co-ordinator with Sphere 17, a regional youth service with centres in Bonnybrook, Priorswood, Kibarrack and Darndale.

"Our priority at the moment is the welfare of our young people. We have been adapting our service provision and summer programme plans in an attempt to provide additional support to the young people who need it."

Among those caught up directly in the chaos was Luna (15, not her real name) who has lived all her life in Darndale. "I was trying to walk towards Northside [shopping centre]. I was terrified. At any given moment, I thought people were going to come up, hit me. People were fighting. I took off running, I was so scared."

Speaking to The Irish Times at a local Sphere 17, Luna says she has been aware of the ongoing protests since March against the planned new use for the Coolock site. She understands people's concerns. "They're scared because [asylum seekers] are coming in and they don't know much about it. I can see why there's like public fear."

Many of her friends, whom she "loves", are "from other countries", however. She adds: "Migration is rarely a choice." She believes people coming to Ireland for refuge are "scared too".

Luna has "big aspirations" for herself, including studying law at university. The violence of the past week upsets and

frightens her. Not only does it reflect badly on her home – "I love Darndale. It gets a bad rap, but it's a great place to live."

"The sense of community is so good... It's a really warm place" – but she worries that young people she knows could get caught up in the disorder. She also fears for her own safety.

"Since the riots kicked off, I am like: 'I am not leaving my house.' I haven't left Darndale unless I've been in a car. I won't even walk over to the shop... I'm very worried about people I know being pepper sprayed."

As we speak, on Thursday afternoon, about 20 young people are at the centre – baking cupcakes, making arts and crafts and playing pool. It's a calm and happy scene in the

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bright, well-equipped space that engages with over 1,000 locals, aged 10 to 24, each year.

Despite her youth, Luna succinctly expresses sentiments echoed elsewhere, by community leaders and public representatives, that local people – particularly the young – will likely pay the heaviest price for the breakdown in public order.

A perceived lack of genuine consultation – listening, explaining and taking on board the community's concerns – by the Department of Integration, which has leased the Coolock site, is brought up repeatedly by people when asked about the anger.

"At the heart of this, though,

is poverty," says Paul Rogers, chief executive of the Northside Partnership which co-ordinates funding and services addressing poverty across northeast Dublin. While the economy nationally has improved, deprivation has worsened across the most disadvantaged areas of Darndale and Coolock, he says, citing 2016 and 2022 Census data collated by the independent agency Pobal.

The area of Darndale where the teenage boys who spoke briefly to The Irish Times were sitting fell from the classification "very disadvantaged" in 2016 to "extremely disadvantaged" in 2022.

In one area, 27 per cent of adults have a primary school education only. Just 7.8 per cent have a third level education. Male unemployment is at 29.97 per cent and female unemployment 14 per cent, while 59 per cent of children are in lone-parent families.

Funding deficit

Despite population growth, funding for many services remains below 2008 levels, Rogers says. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) fund, the partnership's main revenue stream, was cut from €66 million nationally in 2008 and has never recovered, while youth services like Sphere 17 are operating a 15 per cent funding deficit.

"Many of us who work in this community feel there has long been an unspoken policy of: 'Let's put the minimum into it to keep them quiet,'" says Rogers. "And that they don't really care about working class communities like ours."

"I often wonder, for every young person that goes to third level, how much does the Government subsidise them? About €15,000 a year each? But the kids from around here, struggling the most to get

anywhere in life, do they put that kind of money into them? No. "What happened on Monday is reprehensible, but I am not surprised. There is a lot of anger. The State's attitude to Coolock is: 'This is happening whether you like it or not.' The migrant challenge has become a proxy for that anger."

He does not feel it is "helpful" to describe angry young people as "thuggish".

"They are members of our community whether you like it or not," he says. "They may now have a criminal record. They are young people who will come to us at some stage. We will work with them."

Like many, he believes a large proportion of the people involved in disturbances were not venting about migration policy. For some it was "recreational rioting". For others it was general rage.

"As Martin Luther King said, rioting is the language of the unheard."

As we finish, when asked if there is anything she wants to add, Luna says: "I want to say this. I want this rioting to stop because it's got to the point now where businesses, like the cinema [across the road from the site], will close."

"I like the cinema. I want to see Despicable Me 4. I don't want to lose the facilities where we go. [Everyone] needs to go about this situation better."

Comhaltas na nGaedheal X account



“ CnG does not just want a dramatic reduction in immigration, it wants mass deportations, according to an associate of the group

pigs' blood in water guns and "squirting it into their faces".

The following week, two pigs were found at Thornton Hall, a site in Dublin earmarked as accommodation for hundreds of asylum seekers. The pigs had been stabbed but were still alive, and later had to be put down.

The Tipperary man, who says he identifies as a "bit of a national socialist", has been involved in protests outside accommodation centres.

No evidence has emerged to link him to the Thornton Hall incident. However, his rhetoric is part of a growing trend among Irish far-right extremists who eschew electoral politics and are engaged in calls for physical confrontation or violence.

Remarkably frank

The Tipperary man, and others like him, can be remarkably frank about their intentions. "I don't know how many virgins are going to be waiting, but I'll happily help get them there if they want," he said in the publicly accessible meeting, in reference to Muslim immigrants.

There are limits, however. During another meeting, he admonishes other attendees for openly talking about the use of guns in an open forum. "Surely you're not that thick?"

Another newly-established group which focuses on physical confrontation is Comhaltas na nGaedheal (CnG). Established at some point last year, the group is part of a growing international network of so-called "active clubs".

Founded by Robert Rundo, a violent neo-Nazi from the United States, the Active Club net-

active clubs in the US and Europe. Last year, members of Junge Tat, a club from German-speaking Switzerland, visited CnG members and attended an anti-immigration protest in East Wall.

Members of Active Club Scotland have also visited the group on at least one occasion.

"Through its online posts that feature content championing the white race and demeaning multiculturalism and its off-line activities that include hiking, training and combat/MMA work, it's clear Comhaltas na nGaedheal views itself as following in the active club tradition," says Ciarán O'Connor, a senior analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a counter-extremism organisation.

The goal of active clubs is to appeal to disillusioned young men who spend too much time online and have few social activities. "You need to get off the internet. You need to hike, lift weights and train," CnG told prospective members shortly after its establishment.

This appeal to angry keyboard warriors has yielded startling results worldwide. Extremism researchers have been taken aback by the growth of the active club movement. According to a recent report from the Counter Extremism Project, since its establishment in 2021, the network has grown to 104 known cells worldwide.

Until recently, the Irish cell had strong connections to Justin Barrett, the disputed leader of the far-right National Party. According to sources, Barrett sought to use the CnG as a uniformed protection squad for the National Party.

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