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Poisonous mentality is still flourishing in north

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

It is a year since the Russian investigative journalist, Anna Politkovskaya was shot dead as she returned from the shops to her home in Moscow.

It is six years since the northern Irish journalist, Martin O'Hagan was shot dead as he returned from the pub to his home in Lurgan. In neither case has anyone been brought to justice.

In both cases, police made arrests, but prosecutions did not follow.

In both cases, there are strong indications that the killers enjoy some sort of protection by the authorities.

In the case of Martin O'Hagan there are grounds for suspecting that some of the members of the LVF gang which carried out the killing were security force agents, though the PSNI has denied this.

Ms Politkovskaya had worked tirelessly to expose Russian abuses of human rights in Chechnya.

She had been threatened, poisoned, detained and subjected to torture.

She had been publicly disparaged by President Vladimir Putin and other prominent figures.

Soon after her murder, Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko blamed Putin. Mr Litvinenko was poisoned soon afterwards and died. Mr O'Hagan was a thorn in the side of loyalist paramilitary gangs in his home town.

He had been threatened.

He had exposed details of their drug dealing and their collusion with elements of the security forces.

Last year's inquest into his death found that his work on the former was probably the reason he was targeted, British and Irish Rights Watch is more inclined to believe it was the latter.

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I was at the launch in London on Friday night of an award in memory of Ms Politkovskaya sponsored by the new human rights organisation, Reach All Women In War (Raw). The inaugural winner of the award, Natalia Estemirova, had worked closely with the murdered journalist. In a dignified and moving speech, she spoke about how powerful

and effective investigative journalism

could be in uncovering human rights abuses and even in bringing highly placed thugs to justice.

Unfortunately, the award was presented by Mairead Corrigan Maguire, who, along with other women Nobel Peace Prize laureates, is on the international committee of supporters of Raw. Journalists visibly bristled in their seats as Maguire, working the crowd with a beaming, charismatic smile, urged all of us to be like Ms Politkovskaya.

After all, she said, wide-eyed, it was simple, it wasn't complicated to tell the truth.

She also laid into those who had reported from Iraq as "embedded" journalists.

Irish people also raised eyebrows and exchanged looks as she made extravagant claims for the impact her own Peace

People had on bringing an end to the conflict back here.

However, we held our peace. Raw is a fine organisation and there were other excellent contributions to the ceremony, including one from Vanessa Redgrave.

It was pointed out that independent journalists in Chechnya continue to die in mysterious circumstances and that torture, rape, disappearances and killings of civilians are daily occurrences.

Things are by no means that bad in our own place these days.

However, last week saw a new threat from the element that killed Martin O'Hagan, this time using its 'Red Hand Defenders' (RHD) nom-de-guerre, the one it used when it murdered human rights solicitor, Rosemary Nelson and others.

This time it sent a bullet in the post to a newsroom along with a threat to Andersonstown News editor, Robin Livingstone. Last week also saw the appearance of disgusting, hate-filled graffiti in Lurgan, gloating about the O'Hagan murder. Meanwhile, unionists on Craigavon council took the outrageous decision to permit a memorial bench to Mark 'Swinger' Fulton to be put up in

the cemetery.

Ratepayers money will be used to commemorate the one-time right hand man of Billy Wright – dubbed 'King Rat' by O'Hagan.

Fulton was a raving sectarian and convicted extortionist.

These thugs orchestrated much of the violence that surrounded the Orange Order's protests at Drumcree. They murdered Craigavon council employee Adrian Lamph as well as O'Hagan and many, many other innocent Catholic people.

On Friday Secretary of State Shaun Woodward poked his nose in to plead further indulgence of the UDA, the LVF's partner in the RHD.

The poisonous mentality that led to the murder of Martin O'Hagan is still flourishing. Despite the view that the story is over here, there is still plenty for investigative journalists to do.

It isn't simple but it has to be done.

Editors please note.

October 10, 2007

This article appeared first in the October 9, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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