

## The Murder of Adrian Donohoe

By Michael McDowell

Friday was a dark, dark day for Garda Caroline Donohoe, the wife and serving colleague of Detective Garda Adrian Donohoe, for his family, and for the rest of us.

Our hearts go out to them, and to his traumatised fellow member of the force, Garda Joe Ryan, who witnessed a shocking, cold-blooded execution of his friend, a decent man doing his duty to defend all of us from the evil thuggery of those who gunned him down.

We do not yet know the identity of the killers. It is not yet clear whether these psychopaths are members of a small, isolated gang of criminals, or of a larger gang of criminals claiming to act on foot of some form of political motivation.

Revulsion towards this crime and its perpetrators is universal. We – all of us – must make it clear that we stand behind the Garda as our police force in the front line of the battle against all forms of crime no matter what the motive of the criminals involved.

As a former Minister for Justice, I remember on many occasions privately telling those close to me that one of my greatest fears was that I would soon be calling to the home of a Garda in the aftermath of a vicious murder such as this. I was spared that particular fate. There were other occasions when I made such visits in the aftermath of tragic deaths of members of the force in traffic accidents and one occasion when I had to make such a visit to the home of a postmaster, Alan Cunniffe, who was shot down in an armed robbery in Kilkenny in 2006. On such occasions, words of consolation or sympathy seemed wholly inadequate.

Speaking to Mrs Ann McCabe, the widow of Jerry McCabe, as I did on a number of occasions when I was Minister reminded me that the families of slain Gardai just never recover from the brutality inflicted on them and on their loved one, and emphasised to me that these murders are raw and open wounds not only for the brave victim but also for their loved ones and for the wider community.

There is no doubt that every resource available to the Garda will now be focused on investigating this cruel murder and armed catching those who put Adrian Donohoe to death. They deserve no sympathy and no excuses can ever be made from what they have done.

We cannot allow the “drug and gun culture” to destroy innocent lives. We cannot allow the so-called “dissidents” to attack our democracy in a semiformal alliance with those engaging in ordinary criminality.

The penalty for murdering a member of the Garda is mandatory life imprisonment with no prospect of parole for 40 years. This is as it should be. Our Garda is largely unarmed in the performance of its duties. Adrian Donohoe was no trigger happy Garda. He hadn't even drawn his gun as he went to confront the gang that murdered him.

Whenever in the past controversy has erupted about armed confrontations between members of the Garda and members of criminal gangs, I have always taken the side of the Garda unambiguously. Those who use firearms for criminal purposes must know that the community stands foresquare behind the Garda in confronting them and dealing with them.

I have no problem with the principle that use of lethal force by the Garda must be the subject of scrupulous accountability; I do have a problem with armchair generals who ask those who put their lives on the line for us to carry out their duties as if foresight was hindsight, and as if the Garda is on the same moral plane as the robber and murderer.

We grieve collectively for Detective Garda Adrian Donohoe, with his wife, his children, his family and his colleagues.

We should grieve for ourselves as well now that the killing of members of the Garda has resumed in our time.

The least that we can do now to honour his memory is to resolve that there will be no further truck with the demented "dissidents", no tolerance in any circumstance whatsoever for displays of paramilitarism at funerals, commemorations or the like.

Our national flag is not a coffin drape for thugs. The spectacle of its misuse without challenge in this way simply should not be repeated. So-called "guards of honour" consisting of men and women wearing paramilitary garb, black glasses, black berets, and black gloves are criminal in nature and must be prevented.

I wish the Garda success in their hunt for the killers of Det. Gda Adrian Donohoe and I fervently hope against expectation that no other member of the force will meet his fate in this generation.