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UK: The British government is still hiding the truth about my father's murder

Friday 11 December 2020, by [FINUCANE John](#) (Date first published: 4 December 2020).

Boris Johnson is dodging a public inquiry into the killing of Pat Finucane by loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland

On 12 February 1989, my father, the human rights lawyer [Pat Finucane](#), was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries as we sat together at the dinner table in the kitchen of our home in Belfast. I was eight years old. I sat with my mother, my sister and brother and suddenly ended up squeezed into a corner, as the gunmen fired shot after shot into the prone figure of my father. He was 39 years old when he died.

For 31 years, my family have campaigned to uncover the truth behind the murder. We seek to achieve, in death, the justice that my father fought for on behalf of many other people throughout his working life. We have struggled to achieve that justice in the face of extraordinary adversity, as we have been confronted with resistance from the British government and powerful vested interests within the British state.

Despite the efforts of successive British governments to cover up the truth, a great deal is known about the extent of state collusion in the murder of Pat Finucane and others. [We have learned](#) that several British state agencies ran extensive, complex intelligence networks that were fed by a significant number of informants. These agencies included the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the security service (MI5), British army intelligence, and a specialist covert army unit, the Force Research Unit (FRU).

Many people who bear responsibility for the murder of my father were directly employed as agents and informants. One man who was part of the murder gang was recruited as an informant after he admitted to the RUC he had been involved. Another supplied the weapons for the killing and continued to be used as an informant after the murder. The main collector and supplier of intelligence information to the loyalist paramilitaries was a former British soldier, recruited and infiltrated back into his gang for the specific purpose of working as a double agent. He obtained information about many people who were subsequently targeted and assassinated by loyalists. It has been claimed by the British army and the RUC that their agent, [Brian Nelson](#), was instrumental in saving lives. The death toll paints a very different picture.

This is the grisly picture that emerges from an examination of the evidence in the case of Pat Finucane and others. It has been reaffirmed time and again by investigators who have scrutinised the facts. The criminal investigation led by the former Metropolitan police chief Lord Stevens resulted in the arrest of [210 loyalist gang members](#). He concluded that all but three were working as agents or informers. A subsequent review of documents noted that [85% of UDA intelligence](#) came from British security sources. The only sustainable conclusion that emerges from all of the evidence is that state agencies were manipulating and prolonging the conflict for their own ends.

The murder of [Pat Finucane](#) has been described as being symbolic of an attack on the rule of law and not just an individual lawyer. It is obvious that this was the intention behind the killing and the motivation for making sure that it happened. Pat Finucane's murder had a chilling effect on the legal community – some people changed the type of work they did; others left the practice of law altogether. The message was delivered loud and clear: demonstrate courage if you want to, but we will get you next.

It is against this background that the campaign for a public inquiry into the murder of my father has been fought. A commitment was [given in 2001](#) that the case would be the subject of an inquiry if deemed to merit one by a judge of international standing. [Judge Peter Cory](#), formerly of the Canadian supreme court, had no difficulty in concluding that the evidence merited public examination. No inquiry followed. Instead, the law was changed, giving government ministers the power to restrict information.

When the Cameron government took office in 2010, a reassessment of the case was promised. My family and I participated in good faith. We were rewarded for our engagement by a review of the case documents, carried out by a government-appointed lawyer. There were no hearings, no witnesses cross-examined, no evidence heard in public. Reports were published and that was that. So, with nowhere else to go, we took our battle into the courtroom.

In February 2019, the [UK supreme court](#) gave the final ruling. We were successful. The British government tried to argue that the case had been properly and thoroughly investigated. It failed. The supreme court ruled that no investigation into the killing of my father had been “effective”, including those conducted by the police. The ruling highlighted the absence of compulsive powers in the documentary review and particularly the failure to cross-examine and test witnesses' credibility.

On Monday, nearly two years on, the current government responded to the supreme court. After 31 years and the compilation of an overwhelming body of evidence, the [government announced](#) that it would refer the matter back to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The murder of Pat Finucane once prompted the former prime minister David Cameron to apologise on behalf of the nation for “shocking levels of collusion”. The response of Boris Johnson now is, get the local police to sort it out.

Once again, the level of accountability in this democracy slides even further. The current British government has ignored the ruling of the supreme court and swerved away from holding a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane. The attack on the rule of law continues.

What is it they are hiding?

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