

Acquitted Duffly attacks biased judicial system

By Brendan Anderson

LURGAN republican Collin Duffly, freed yesterday on murder charges for the second time in 13 months, has bitterly attacked the system which he claims kept an innocent man locked up for almost four years.

Speaking at his home last night, Mr Duffly categorically denied having any part in, or knowledge of the double murder of two policemen in Lurgan earlier this year. He had been arrested and charged, he

said, simply because he was a republican.

Earlier yesterday, in a hearing which lasted barely one minute, a Lisburn magistrate heard a crown lawyer concede there "was no reasonable prospect of a conviction" against the accused who has been in custody since June.

The tiny Number Two courtroom in Lisburn was packed to capacity and police stationed at the door initially refused to admit several journalists. However, several of Mr Duffly's relatives, in response to a request from his solicitor, agreed to leave the room and gave their place to reporters.

It is understood the prosecution case against Mr Duffly collapsed after crown lawyers interviewed their controversial main witness, a woman identified in previous hearings as Witness D.

He had been charged with

shooting Constable Roland John Graham and Reserve Constable David Johnson at Church Walk, Lurgan, on June 16 this year.

A life sentence imposed on Collin Duffly for the murder of former UDR man John Lyness was overturned by the appeal court in September last year after he had spent three-and-a-half years in prison.

Relaxing with his family in their Kilwilkie estate home, Mr Duffly spoke of his anger and bitterness at what he claims was an establishment attempt to "get him out of the way".

He said: "These people look upon me and people like me as being lesser than others."

"I am a republican and I want to see an Irish republic. That is a legitimate political aspiration. You don't have to be republican to be arrested and charged but it

helps to give them more credibility in the process of arresting and convicting people.

"The powers that be in this state are going to have to face up to the fact that my views and beliefs are as valid and legitimate as their's are."

He said court officials, at each stage of his case, seemed to regard him as guilty "even before the trial started and even though they did not know me from Adam".

Asked if he had taken part, had prior knowledge, or knew anything about the double murder, he said: "Under no circumstances had I any part whatever to play in the killing of these two RUC men. You don't need to have played a part for them to treat you this way."

"They worked their investigation in reverse, taking the view that I did it (killing the two policemen)

and then looking for witnesses to back it up. They were mentioning my name to potential witnesses and applying subtle pressure on people. They did not take into regard the fact that I was down here in Kilwilkie or that there were 12 people who seen me down the street at the time."

He said it was frustrating knowing the fragility of the prosecution case and waiting for the truth to come out about Witness D's unreliability.

"When they said in the barracks they were going to charge me, I was up to millions in the blatant way in which it was done. After the initial shock, I began to think, the wife is pregnant and I have to go back into jail again, back to the blocks. I remember thinking of all the wee problems like, I will need a petrol lighter in jail."

Mr Duffly said he was not

beaten while in custody but "had come in for some rough treatment".

He said: "I did not know until the last minute that I was actually getting charged. From there on, it was handcuffs on and bullyboy tactics."

"There were 20 or 25 RUC from the Mobile Support Unit around me when I was being moved from the cells at Gough Barracks to the Land Rover. My hands were handcuffed behind my back and my arms shoved up my back. It was all totally unnecessary."

"And it was strange that before every court appearance, ball applications, remands or whatever, the RUC were saturating the town, this estate, sending detectives on house-to-house inquiries. I believe they were trawling to get someone else to back up or substitute this Witness D."

"They knew her form,

they knew that a case based on her evidence was never going to go any distance. It got me out of the way for a few months and I think they were hoping to come up with something else in the meantime, they were looking for another witness."

Praising his family and friends who campaigned for his release, Mr Duffly said he had benefited from their experience acquired during the earlier campaign when he was against his first conviction for murder.

"I was fortunate that there was a good squad of people here, seasoned from the last case. And my solicitor, Rosemary Nelson, was unbelievable, she is brilliant."

Mr Duffly said he had no immediate plans for the future except to "settle back into family life" and support his wife during her final days of pregnancy.