

LAWYERS

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FOR [REDACTED]

WITH PIC OF ROSEMARY NELSON FROM [REDACTED], PLUS STOCK PIC OF PAT FINUCANE FROM [REDACTED], WHO IS PHONING [REDACTED] ON FRIDAY MORNING

Anne Cadwallader

RUC detectives tell people being interrogated at Castlereagh Holding Centre in Belfast and Gough Barracks in Armagh the strangest things about their solicitor, Rosemary Nelson.

"They say I'm a terrorist, and that makes them a terrorist too. Sometimes they say I'm a tout. They also ask if I'm a 'good ride' and say it's well known that my clients are sleeping with me.

"It's not just the odd occasion. I can honestly say that of people fighting scheduled (paramilitary-linked) charges, 100% of them are told this sort of dangerous, insulting rubbish".

Rosemary Nelson, sitting in her offices in central Lurgan, is a woman living on her nerves, which is hardly surprising. She reels off the litany of abuse and threats levelled at her, and her clients, by the RUC.

Next Friday, she will be giving evidence about what she claims is a "systematic and concerted campaign of intimidation and abuse" to a UN special investigator on the independence of judges and lawyers in the North.

Malaysian lawyer, Param Cumaraswamy, is to meet British ministers, judges, lawyers - and hopes to visit Castlereagh Holding Centre during his ten day visit, beginning tomorrow.

Nelson is involved in three high-profile cases. She has won freedom for Lurgan man, Colin Duffy, twice. He was freed on appeal in 1996 from a murder conviction and life sentence when the star prosecution witness was convicted of gunrunning for the UVF from Scotland.

Within a year of his release, he was charged with the murder of two RUC men in Lurgan on June 16th this year. When the star prosecution witness in this case was shown to be so mentally unreliable that members of her own family would testify against her, Duffy was freed a second time.

Nelson is also the legal advisor to the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, 200 of whose members are issuing civil claims for damages against the RUC for assault and wrongful imprisonment on July 6th when an Orange march was forced through the area.

She is also the legal advisor to the Hamill family, who claim that RUC officers in Lurgan sat in their landrover yards from where Robert Hamill was beaten and kicked to death by loyalists in the town.

None of this, while entirely legitimate professional work, endears her to members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Lurgan. And they make their feelings abundantly clear.

"The worst threat is that I am going to be killed. They told one guy 'You're going to die when you get out. And tell Rosemary she's going to die too.' Then there's the usual abuse, like I'm a "f.....g Fenian b.....d".

She shows me a statement, made to a human rights group by a man who has been questioned recently by the RUC in Belfast. In it he reports police comments which

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refer to her attributes, as a woman, in such derogatory terms that they cannot be printed.

"When I speak to RUC officers on the phone, the hostility, the sheer hatred, comes down the line. They are polite to my face, exaggeratedly so. But behind my back, they say what they like.

"The fear is like an ache, nagging away at the back of your mind", she says. Nelson protects her children, aged twelve, seven and ten, from the fear. But her husband, an accountant, "worries a lot.

"What the RUC don't realise is that, although it can unsettle the person being interrogated, it doesn't have any effect on me. It just makes me more determined to do my job honestly".

Nelson isn't alone. According to Pearse MacDermott, spokesman for the Solicitors Criminal Bar Association in the North, the small number of legal professionals who deal in "scheduled" offences in the North are all targeted in this way, persistently.

"It's unnerving that the forces of the state make direct or indirect threats. It preys on peoples' minds. We work in an adversarial system, but it shouldn't involve naked aggression.

"Lawyers have been reluctant to put their heads above the parapet, in case it exacerbates things. They tend to take their own security precautions, and keep their heads down.

"After Pat Finucane was shot dead, some obtained firearms for their own protection. The Law Society has not dealt with this as expeditiously as it should have", says MacDermott.

Finucane was killed three weeks after a House of Commons statement by a British Home Office minister, Douglas Hogg (who became notorious much later for forcing his reluctant young daughter to eat a beefburger, in front of TV cameras, at the height of the "mad cow" crisis).

Hogg said in 1989 that there were a number of solicitors in the North who "are unduly sympathetic to the cause of the IRA. One has to bear that in mind". He then repeated what he had said, in case anyone had missed it.

Seamus Mallon, the SDLP deputy leader, responded by saying, prophetically, "I have no doubt that there are lawyers walking the streets, or driving the roads, of the North of Ireland who have become targets for assassins' bullets as a result of the statement that has been made tonight".

Geraldine Finucane, the dead lawyer's widow, said in a rare interview this week, that Hogg's slur, made under Parliamentary privilege, had changed her life entirely.

"Pat was used to the threats, but we thought they meant to scare his clients. When Hogg said what he said, we knew he was talking about Pat, and that the threats were real. It changed the whole ball game.

"Pat was chosen because he was beating the system at its own game. His murder was ordered by people in the British military and legal establishment", she says.

Paranoia? Not according to Amnesty International, British/Irish Rights Watch and several groups of leading US lawyers and Irish/American congressmen, who are demanding an independent inquiry.

At the trial, and in the private diaries, of Brian Nelson, British double agent and UDA intelligence officer, it was revealed that the British were warned at least

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twice that Finucane was being targeted. This is undisputed fact.

Nelson personally took a photograph of the Finucane home, where the lawyer was later shot dead, in front of his family, during Sunday evening dinner. Nelson provided a photograph of Finucane, taken as he left court, for the assassin.

In many peoples' minds, the links are clear. A Home Office minister makes unprecedented allegations against defence lawyers in the North. The UDA targets Finucane, the most prominent.

Nelson, a UDA intelligence officer, tells his "handlers" in British military intelligence of the plot. They fail to give any warning. The UDA shoots Finucane dead.

"I have a different life now that Pat's gone. Everything has changed. Some faceless person's signature, or command, ordered Pat's death. But the can of worms is opening. We're not afraid to rock the boat, and we're going to keep on rocking it".

██████████ was Pat Finucane's colleague and best friend. The intensity of his anger at the UDA murder has not undiminished. Neither has his conviction that the British Army and RUC colluded in the murder.

His eyes burn with fury as he catalogues the number of authoritative human rights bodies who have demanded an independent inquiry - with not so much as an acknowledgement from the British government.

██████████ and Finucane are currently suing the British Ministry of Defence for negligence and derogation of duty in failing to warn Pat Finucane when they knew the UDA was targeting him.

"You can't divorce the threats and abuse of lawyers from the whole system which is intended to humiliate and intimidate people into making confessions. It's all part and parcel of the reason people will never accept the RUC as an impartial police force. Never".

Just this week, Kevin Winters, a solicitor with Madden and Finucane, was called a "Provo bastard" to his face in Gough Barracks, Armagh. Solicitors in the North are hoping that UN concern will, as Rosemary Nelson demands, "bring all this finally to an end".

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