

14-JAN-98 14:02 PAT FINUCANE CENTRE

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- The continued use and abuse of emergency legislation is a cause of real concern, particularly in relation to detention centres. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers money has been paid out in compensation claims to detainees who have been assaulted or falsely imprisoned at the centres. We are aware of no subsequent action, disciplinary or criminal, against the officers responsible. The denial of the right of detainees to have their solicitor present during interrogation creates the circumstances in which such abuse takes place. The European Court of Human Rights has already concluded that not allowing a detainee to have his/her lawyer present in conjunction with the changes in the right to silence, is a violation of the right to a fair trial. This was in February 1996; the government has so far done nothing to comply with this judgment.

In order to begin the process of restoring public confidence we would urge the Secretary of State to address our concerns by ensuring that the rule of law is applied in Northern Ireland. In particular we urge her to:

- Order an immediate inquiry into the death of Pat Finucane, and release the full Stevens Report.
- Institute a root and branch review of policing and the administration of justice with a view to creating a framework which is accountable, democratic and representative.
- Repeal emergency legislation, close the detention centres, restore the right to silence and allow for the presence of solicitors during interrogation of clients.
- Ban plastic bullets, as the Labour Party promised to do in opposition.

Central to the conflict in Northern Ireland has been the failure of the law to guarantee equal protection of rights. It therefore follows that the application in practice of the principle that all are equal under the law is fundamental to a resolution of the conflict. The rule of law must be observed by all, including the state. The guiding principle of government policy should be the protection of human rights.