

# Suspect arrested for murder of Irish lawyer claims he was an RUC agent

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Allegations of Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) collusion with loyalist gunmen were given further weight Thursday, when a man arrested for the murder of civil rights lawyer Pat Finucane claimed to have been working as an RUC informer at the time of the killing.

Finucane was shot 14 times in front of his family by Ulster Defence Association (UDA) gunmen who burst into his home in north Belfast in February 1989. In the 10 years since then, there have been widespread allegations that the gunmen acted on information given them by the RUC and other security services. Though more than a dozen people were arrested in the original RUC investigation, no one was ever charged with the murder.

On June 24, William Alfred Stobie was charged with the murder following fresh inquiries into the controversial killing. Finucane's homicide and the failure of the RUC to mount any serious investigation into it have become the focus of calls for the disbanding of the force.

Rosemary Nelson, another prominent civil rights lawyer murdered earlier this year after receiving death threats from the RUC via her clients, had led a prominent campaign for a full and independent investigation into RUC collusion in the Finucane murder.

In a desperate attempt to clear the name of the RUC, Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan called in London Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner John Stevens to reopen the Finucane case in April this year. Stevens had headed an investigation on behalf of the British government in 1989, after UDA men released official Army Intelligence documents to the media. Security forces reacted with deep hostility to the earlier inquiry with attempts to frustrate its work, including the

burning down of its RUC-guarded offices.

The report from the Stevens inquiry detailed substantial evidence of collusion between the Force Research Unit, an army intelligence unit, and loyalist gunmen—but concluded that there was no evidence of "widespread or institutionalised" collusion between the RUC and loyalist paramilitaries. The Stevens report was suppressed in a top-level cover-up and only became known when parts of it were published in the *Daily Telegraph* last year.

The arrest of Stobie has done nothing to allay suspicions of RUC collusion with loyalist gunmen. In his first court appearance, Stobie said in a statement read out at Belfast Magistrates' Court that he was pleading "not guilty of the charge you have put to me tonight. At the time I was a police informer for Special Branch and on the night of the death of Pat Finucane I informed Special Branch on two occasions by telephone that a person was to be shot".

Stobie's solicitor Joe Rice said: "My client has asked me to state that the murky web of deceit and lies spun around this murder does not emanate from him." Repudiating the charge of murder he said: "He was a paid Crown agent acting on behalf of the police from around 1987 to 1990. On at least two occasions he gave police information before this murder that clearly was not acted upon. He also gave police information after the murder about the murder weapon."

No official denial of Stobie's involvement with the RUC has yet been made. Chief Constable Flanagan simply reiterated his insistence that records would continue to be passed on to the inquiry team. "I think all of these issues will become clear in due course. When that becomes clear it will be seen it does not leave us vulnerable," he added.

Former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten is due to

report on the future of policing in Northern Ireland this September. But the Unionists and the British government have consistently ruled out any possibility of the RUC being disbanded.



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