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Local & National

Finucanes not told of probe delay due 'admin issue'

Saturday, April 26, 2008

By Chris Thornton

Pat Finucane's family were not told that preparations for an inquiry into the solicitor's murder had been suspended because it was considered an " internal administrative issue", officials dealing with the inquiry have claimed.

Mr Finucane's widow Geraldine revealed yesterday that former Secretary of State Peter Hain ordered a halt to the inquiry preparations 18 months ago without telling her. She only learned of the move from an official letter to her solicitor two weeks ago.

Preparatory work was stopped because of a stand-off between the family and the NIO over the legislation under which the inquiry would be run into the murder of the solicitor — branded an act of collusion by former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Stevens.

Mr Finucane was shot dead in front of his family by the UDA. But in the years since it has been established that the gunman, the man who supplied the weapon and at least one other loyalist involved in the plot were security force informers.

A retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice recommended an inquiry into the murder in 2003. The Government sat on his report for six months, publishing it in 2004 and agreeing to an inquiry at that stage. But the new Inquiries Act was rushed through Parliament in 2005 to increase the powers available to ministers to withhold parts of the findings.

After meeting the family in late 2006, Mr Hain ordered a halt to preparation.

"In the autumn of 2006, the then Secretary of State took the decision that, in light of the Finucane family's continued opposition, it was no longer justifiable to continue to devote public money to preparations for an inquiry which the family would refuse to accept under the terms of the Inquiries Act," an official wrote to Mrs Finucane's solicitor, Peter Madden two weeks ago.

Mrs Finucane was furious at the decision.

"I have long doubted whether the British Government had any real intention of ever establishing a genuinely independent public inquiry into Pat's murder," she said before meeting Taoiseach Bertie Ahern yesterday.

Both sides have indicated they are prepared to discuss the situation, but Michael Finucane, the murdered solicitor's eldest son, said yesterday that the Government has turned down several requests for further meetings.

"We do see a point and would like to discuss it," he said.

"In fact, we've asked for that opportunity twice now, with the Prime Minister and between our lawyers and theirs. Our suggestion about a lawyer/lawyer meeting was rejected."

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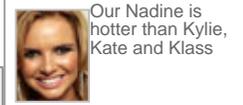
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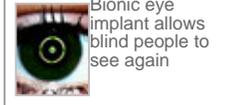
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