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***He Was Shot 14 Times at the Dinner Table. His Children Want to Know if Britain Ordered the Hit.***

The investigation of the 1972 killing of five people in Springhill is among many inquiries into the Troubles that are stymied by British government delays.

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BELFAST, Northern Ireland — John and Michael Finucane were children in 1989 when paramilitary gunmen smashed in the front door with a sledgehammer in the middle of Sunday dinner and opened fire. Their father, the human rights lawyer Pat Finucane, was still clutching his fork when he succumbed to his 14 bullet wounds. Michael, his eldest child, remembers cowering under the kitchen table with his younger siblings while “Only Fools and Horses,” a British sitcom, droned through his father’s killing.

The Finucane assassination was among the most notorious killings in Northern Ireland’s blood-drenched recent history. It was noteworthy, first, because Mr. Finucane was a lawyer — charismatic, crusading, a self-made Catholic — and even amid the worst violence, defense lawyers were not generally considered fair game.

But it’s the Finucane family’s grueling, fruitless legal battle for a full-fledged public inquiry that has turned the assassination into a lingering emblem of official — and specifically British — impunity. Even former Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain acknowledged “strands of involvement” between British security forces and loyalist death squads in Finucane’s murder, and apologized to the family for what he called “shocking levels of state collusion.” But despite this hard-fought taste of vindication, Mr. Cameron, too, refused a public inquiry.

On a street of terraced house in Belfast a red sign on the side of a building shows a black and white photo of a man on a phone and the words Pat Finucane.

Patrick Finucane was murdered in his home by unionist militants in 1989.

Finucane’s son Michael has been trying to document the British government’s role in his murder. The questions that have always haunted the family — who ordered the hit, and why, and who in London might have known — remain unanswered. A succession of British governments, even Mr. Cameron’s, despite the apology, has obfuscated, offered up “investigations” lacking sufficient investigative power, disregarded court rulings and rewritten laws rather than order a full investigation into Mr. Finucane’s assassination.

Official British efforts to evade scrutiny extend well beyond the Finucane case and appear to be reaching their apogee. The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill is expected to pass into law

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when the British Parliament reconvenes next month. The “legacy bill,” as it’s known, would end hundreds of investigations into well over 1,000 killings from the Troubles, the blood-soaked, quarter-century-long conflict among the mostly Protestant unionists, or loyalists, (who’d enjoyed centuries of dominance and clung fiercely to their British identity); the mostly Catholic republicans, or nationalists, (who wanted full rights on an island free from British rule); and, as the years and the blood ran on, British security services, who were tightly intermeshed with unionist communities.

The bill seeks to end most ongoing legal proceedings into Troubles deaths and prevent new investigations from getting started. The sweeping shutdown would include coroners’ inquests, police legacy investigations, civil litigation and police ombudsman reports, which have continued to turn up fresh evidence. The bill would, instead, set up a far more limited commission that would lack many investigative powers and prosecutorial authority.

Most controversially, the bill would offer a path to immunity for all manner of offense, no matter how egregious. Nobody here wants it. Not unionists, who complain that Irish Republican Army killers were never held sufficiently to account for their ruthless targeting of both security and civilian targets. Not nationalists, many of whom waited decades for investigations that only recently got underway or haven’t yet begun. Human rights groups, every Irish political party, even the British Labour Party — all have denounced the legislation. There is a dark, true joke in Belfast that the legacy bill achieved the impossible: It united

Why are the British doing it, then, and why now? Jonathan Caine, a parliamentary under secretary of state for Northern Ireland, and the man who has become most associated with the legislation, declined to be interviewed. In a letter to an Irish-American advocacy group earlier this summer, he acknowledged that the bill “contains uncomfortable and finely balanced choices,” but insisted it was the best way forward. The legislation is supported by many veterans, who complain of harassment and mental distress from decades-long investigations. But there is also the hint of a deeper motive — the desire to fix in history a glossy story of honorable British impartiality in a sectarian fight that raged internally (which it was) rather than a bloody and rule-bending campaign to put down an insurrection against an occupation (which, in the minds of many fighters, it also was).

“Now there’s a realization that what happened here was not the black-and-white narrative, put out by the British, that they were an independent referee that was here keeping the peace,” said John Finucane, who now represents North Belfast in the House of Commons. “The state was not just behaving very badly, but was actually controlling acts that were irreversible, that led to multiple losses of lives. This bill is to ensure there’s no accountability.”

At 43, John Finucane is a rising star in Sinn Fein, the republican party that has matured from the political wing of the Irish Republican Army to arguably the most influential party across the island. His older brother, 51-year-old Michael, abandoned his ambitions of professional acting after witnessing his father’s assassination; he is now a Dublin lawyer who sits on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. They have taken their place in the unsteady Irish peace that emerged from the 1998 Good

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Friday Agreement, which quelled the violence by mapping out compromises to some of the conflict’s thorniest questions.

In the courtyard of several buildings, A man with graying hair, a gray jacket and an open-collared white shirt speaks to two women in gray work smocks. Finucane’s son John represents a section of Belfast in the British Parliament.

The British Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that previous investigations failed to meet the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights. But even that reprimand from the land’s highest court failed to

spur the government to action. So the Finucanes returned to court yet again, and once again, the court agreed: Last December, the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland ruled that the government’s inaction constituted a breach of legal obligation. Still — no investigation. “It’s about exposing publicly and totally the truth, not only about this murder, but all of the surrounding frameworks,” Michael Finucane said. “The people involved. How high up did it go?”

“Collusion” is a loaded word in Northern Ireland, shorthand for the corrupt entanglement of government security forces and paramilitaries. Once derided as a nationalist conspiracy theory, collusion is by now an undeniable fact. The scale, however, remains unknown. People quibble over which exact tactics in this very dirty war rose to the level of collusion, especially given the murk of identity-fueled urban murder squads. Was collusion a coherent strategy or the fragmentary work of a staggering number of bad apples? And if there was a strategy, how high into the British government did it reach?

Victims’ advocates believe that as many as one-third of more than 3,500 Troubles deaths bear the fingerprints of British security forces. But that could mean a lot of things: that a murder weapon came from the unionist firearm cache smuggled from South Africa by a British Army agent. Or that the victim was targeted using files leaked to death squads by intelligence and the police, or even killed by a British undercover agent or informer, who were rife within the ranks of both republican and unionist paramilitaries. Or perhaps security forces cleared the path for escaping gunmen by inexplicably removing roadblocks. Maybe crucial evidence went missing afterward or was conveniently destroyed. Each of those things happened over and over again in Northern Ireland, and most of them happened in the Finucane case.

But since all of that is already documented, it’s striking that the British government still refuses a public inquiry. Perhaps it’s an official reflex of secrecy, or maybe something is still obscured at the bottom of this dark water, too ugly to be dredged. But what could be so much worse than what we already know? The uncomfortable suspicion that something terrible is still being hidden — Were my neighbors involved? Did the police help? Did the British government go to war against its own subjects? — still suffuses Northern Ireland. It clouds the peace, undermines the agreements and seeps down into new

Perhaps no day of the Troubles led to more grief than Bloody Sunday in 1972, when British soldiers opened fire on a protest march in Derry.Perhaps no day of the Troubles led to more grief than Bloody Sunday in 1972, when British soldiers opened fire on a protest march in Derry. In those days, warnings and augurs sometimes slid into the streets of Belfast with no apparent author: a mural with a message, a

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spray-painted accusation, a rumor that drifted suddenly into the air. In the weeks before Pat Finucane’s assassination, people started saying that he was secretly an official in the Irish Republican Army, the underground paramilitary organization that viciously attacked both loyalist and British targets.

You should find a new solicitor, the interrogators would suggest ominously to his clients; Finucane won’t be around much longer. The insinuation even cropped up in the House of Commons, where a lawmaker who’d recently been briefed by security officials in Northern Ireland complained that some solicitors were “unduly sympathetic to the cause of the I.R.A.” A few weeks later, Mr. Finucane was dead.

Ken Barrett, a loyalist gunman who eventually confessed to killing Mr. Finucane on orders from the paramilitary Ulster Defense Association, told a BBC investigative reporter, John Ware, that when he’d expressed reluctance about “whacking” a solicitor, his paramilitary boss took him to meet an intelligence agent from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the militarized British police force that patrolled Northern Ireland. Mr. Barrett said the agent assured him that Mr. Finucane was a key figure who managed the I.R.A.’s finances, and insisted that he must be eliminated. Mr. Barrett hadn’t been particularly concerned with the morality of the situation, but he believed lawyers were untouchable, and he feared a harsh crackdown that could result in raids and gun seizures. “Solicitors were kind of way taboo,” he told Mr. Ware. “We used a lot of Roman Catholic solicitors ourselves.”

But Mr. Barrett said he’d come to understand something: The Ulster Defense Association was going after Mr. Finucane at the suggestion of the constabulary. Mr. Barrett explained that during interrogations, the police had been encouraging U.D.A. members to kill Mr. Finucane. He also insisted that were it not for the pressure of the police (whom Mr. Barrett called “peelers” per Belfast slang), Mr. Finucane would not have been targeted.

While it’s no secret that three of Mr. Finucane’s brothers were members of the I.R.A., no evidence suggests that Mr. Finucane himself was involved. Michael Finucane called the allegation a piece of “black propaganda” used to cloud the waters of a state-sanctioned execution.

The conjecture over I.R.A. membership conveniently obscures a sharper point: Pat Finucane was making tangible headway against the draconian tactics used by British forces under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act. He grabbed headlines by representing familiar I.R.A. figures like Bobby Sands and Patrick McGeown. More important, though, he was threatening the legal framework used by the police and security forces across Northern Ireland.

Mr. Finucane was the first lawyer to have an antiterrorism detention declared unlawful after filing a habeas corpus petition. He represented the widow of Gervais McKerr, said to be one of the first victims of the “shoot to kill” policy, under which suspected paramilitary members were allegedly shot on sight.

Civil rights law in the United States had inspired Mr. Finucane with the possibilities of lodging civil suits against the police for assault and false imprisonment, which he began to file and win in Northern Ireland. He won a landmark judgment that forced security service members to submit to questioning at coroner’s inquests (this was later overturned by the House of Lords).

Mr. Finucane was winning — not all the time, but surely more often than the authorities liked. His work was both an embarrassment and, increasingly, a practical inconvenience. And then he was dead.

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Mr. Barrett also said that Brian Nelson, an infamous undercover British Army officer who’d infiltrated the Ulster Defense Association, met him days before the assassination and handed him a photograph of Mr. Finucane. Mr. Nelson then drove Mr. Barrett past the Finucane house to be sure they got the right place.

When a British barrister, Desmond de Silva, conducted a document review of the Finucane case, he reported that the U.D.A. had gotten a full 85 percent of its intelligence from the military and the police. (While the U.D.A. was killing people for years, the British government didn’t get around to outlawing it as a terrorist organization until 1992.)

A roadblock near Mr. Finucane’s house was removed the night of the murder, and according to Mr. Barrett, his boss got a call from the intelligence handler telling him the coast was clear.

Mr. Nelson wasn’t the only undercover agent involved in Mr. Finucane’s killing. There was also William Stobie, a British Army veteran who’d joined the U.D.A. and then turned police informant. Mr. Stobie told the journalist Ed Moloney that he’d been sent to deliver guns to the killers who were headed to the Finucane house. He also said that he’d told his intelligence handler about the impending attack but that the police didn’t make any effort to stop the assassination.

A gun that Mr. Stobie said he delivered, a Browning 9-millimeter pistol that had been pilfered from an army barracks and was used in at least one other loyalist shooting, was eventually recovered and stored in the Northern Ireland Forensics Laboratory. But then, without explanation, it was given back to the British Army. According to news reports, the army took the gun apart and got rid of the barrel and slide — the two parts that leave distinctive marks on bullets.

Mr. Stobie had become outspoken and defiant by the end of his life, calling on authorities to grant the Finucane family’s demand for a public inquiry and threatening to name his police intelligence handlers. He was acquitted of charges connected to Mr. Finucane’s death in 2001 after the key prosecution witness refused to take the stand, warning he’d have a nervous breakdown if forced to testify. Just over two weeks after Mr. Stobie walked free, he was shot dead by paramilitaries who accused him of betraying his fellow loyalists.

It is a murky, messy story, laced through with double agents and double crossings and characters whose word must be met with skepticism. All the more reason for a public airing of the facts. Somehow, though, the inquiry never came.

In the summer of 2021, a coroner in Northern Ireland announced the long-awaited findings of an inquest into what nationalists call the Ballymurphy massacre. Fifty years had passed since 11 people, including a Catholic priest and a mother of eight children, were shot dead when British soldiers, mostly from the Parachute Regiment, swept the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast. Amid several sections of terraced house a bush grows next to a walkway through a grass courtyard.

The soldiers insisted they’d only fired back against republican gunmen, and inquests at the time failed to reach any conclusion. The families of the dead bitterly disputed the soldiers’ version of events and spent years lobbying for a new investigation. Finally, in 2018, the first of 150 witnesses testified in an inquest into 10 of the deaths.

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The coroner’s findings were a vindication for the families and spread hope to other long-ignored survivors. All 10 of the dead had been civilians, she said, and nine of them were shot by soldiers. (The shooter of the tenth victim couldn’t be determined.)

“All of the deceased,” the coroner, Siobhan Keegan, said, “were entirely innocent of any wrongdoing on the day in question.”

Irish nationalists reveled in the landmark finding. But that very day, in a speech to Parliament, Queen Elizabeth II signaled that the government would soon unveil measures to “address the legacy of the past” in Northern Ireland. Conservative-leaning British newspapers reported that the government was preparing an amnesty to prevent British soldiers and paramilitaries from being prosecuted for Troubles offenses.

Those were the first hints of a series of maneuverings that would eventually coalesce into the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill. Politicians across the island of Ireland criticized the timing as a vindictive slap in the face, and the whole idea as a betrayal.

It hadn’t been long since the British government negotiated the 2014 Stormont House Agreement with Irish and Northern Irish leaders, creating groups for information retrieval and investigation, and committing to the principle that all work having to do with the past should be “victim-centered.”

The current bill is different — a new commission would document the violence of the Troubles and present findings to grieving families. Going forward, it would be the only official fact-finding body empowered to investigate the many unresolved killings.

Proponents describe it as an opportunity to discover long-sought truth and finally throw open the archives — but only once the likelihood of prosecution or cash settlements (such as the undisclosed but “significant” sum negotiated with the Ministry of Defense by the Ballymurphy families based on the coroner’s report) are off the table.

But there is widespread skepticism that the new commission would unearth the conflict’s dark secrets. On the contrary, many people regard it as a whitewash designed to usurp the fruitful investigations already taking place or still to come. The other serious objection is that as the bill is now written, anyone who offers information could get amnesty in exchange.

In other words, the British appear to be unilaterally moving to let all manner of perpetrators off the hook, no matter what they did or how their victims feel about it. Many people in Ireland and Northern Ireland consider this a violation of both the Good Friday Agreement and the Stormont House Agreement.

Grainne Teggart, deputy director of Amnesty International in Belfast, told me that her organization is concerned because the British government is “toying with a delicate peace settlement” and because her group fears the legislation may become a “blueprint,” setting a new, ignominious standard for ignoring victims. It’s internationally unprecedented,” Ms. Teggart said. “It’s a dangerous piece of legislation.”

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Jim Shannon, a leading unionist lawmaker with the Democratic Unionist Party, broke down in the House of Commons earlier this summer while arguing against the bill. Mr. Shannon’s cousin, a British soldier who was then a 28-year-old newlywed, was shot repeatedly in the face during an I.R.A. ambush in 1971. His killers were never caught.

“Our pain is still here,” Mr. Shannon told the other British lawmakers in July, choking back tears. “Our pain is still raw. And our people grieve and my constituents grieve. We can’t see justice. We don’t see it.”

You can imagine a world in which the British initiative might make sense — where all parties were ready to release the past and the British government was broadly regarded as a good-faith actor who would impartially present the truth.

But we don’t live in that world. Northern Irish society remains crowded with grudges and grievances. Many people still live in segregated neighborhoods and attend segregated schools. Miles of towering “peace walls” snake between traditionally Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods in Belfast, punctuated by gates locked overnight by the police. And now Brexit has left the island of Ireland split between a patch of six British counties up north, which will share in the unforeseeable fortunes of the United Kingdom, and the more prosperous European country that constitutes the rest of the island. All of this has sharpened existential questions about whether Northern Ireland is fated, sooner or later, to join the rest of the island in a united country.

In this uncertain climate, the murder squads of the Troubles remain a topic of extreme volatility, and the extent of British collusion is one of the most painful open questions. The cold reality is that the government in London does not have enough trust or credibility among the people of Northern Ireland to control the fate of the community’s open wounds. Years of delay, obfuscation and evidence tampering cannot be easily overcome, now, with bland rhetoric about reconciliation.

“The full story, in this area, has never been revealed,” said Michael Maguire, who served for years as Northern Ireland’s police ombudsman.

Of the hundreds of complaints Mr. Maguire received regarding the period before the Good Friday Agreement, about 85 percent to 90 percent of them contained allegations of official collusion, he said. His team of investigators turned up ample evidence of collusion between the police and paramilitaries, but their work was hampered — active police officers were legally bound to submit to questioning, but not retired cops, members of other security forces or paramilitaries. Mr. Maguire found the resulting picture compelling, but fractured and incomplete.

“I was dealing on a case-by-case basis,” he said, echoing a common complaint. “I wasn’t seeing the strategic level. I wasn’t seeing the views of Whitehall … you always felt there was more information that you just can’t get.”

The stories of British interference in solving the mysteries of the Troubles have filled several books, but here are some of the most notorious examples: Reams of documents stored in police barracks in Armagh were shredded on the instructions of the police after the papers had apparently been contaminated with asbestos; a government minister explained that it had been too expensive to clean them. Mr. Maguire has said the documents included suspect-interview notes. Their loss has impeded several investigations, i

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including the killing of six people watching a 1994 World Cup match in a Loughinisland pub popular with Catholics.

In 2000, when a long-desired new investigation began to re-examine Bloody Sunday — the 1972 shooting of unarmed civilians by British soldiers during a protest march in Derry — the Defense Ministry admitted to inexplicably destroying two of the guns, which the army had been instructed to preserve as

The British police commissioner, John Stevens, who was repeatedly dispatched to Belfast to look into security collusion with paramilitaries, reported that the military had at first simply lied to him, denying any use of military intelligence agents in Northern Ireland. This would have been an attempt to keep him from investigating the Force Research Unit, a covert unit implicated in many of the deadly collusion cases.

Mr. Stevens eventually zeroed in on Brian Nelson, the undercover agent who smuggled the South African guns that wound up in the hands of loyalist paramilitaries and was also implicated in helping to set up Pat Finucane’s assassination. The Stevens team planned to arrest Mr. Nelson in 1990. But hours before the planned raid, Mr. Nelson fled to England, apparently tipped off. The same night, a mysterious fire broke out in Mr. Stevens’s office, which was inside Northern Irish police headquarters, destroying most of the office and its contents.

To this day, rights advocates say, the British government stalls investigations by saying it can’t find its former soldiers. In the ongoing inquest into the shooting deaths of three teenagers and a priest in Springhill in 1972, for example, civilians and witnesses have testified, but the investigation hangs in limbo because the Defense Ministry claims it can’t find the soldiers who opened fire.

“It’s a standard prevarication,” said Mark Thompson, who co-founded Relatives for Justice, an NGO, after his own brother was shot dead by members of the Force Resistance Unit. “They spend time, then they say the soldiers have PTSD or Alzheimer’s, and then it’s an application for anonymity or public interest. They drag it on for years and years.”

I met John Finucane on a drab summer day in Belfast, when rain ran in the gutters and pushed the crowds of shoppers and sightseers into doorways. Mr. Finucane’s law firm sits near the spot where the Falls Road, a rambling thoroughfare that has long been Belfast’s Catholic heartland, dotted with Irish cultural centers, I.R.A. memorials and repurposed linen mills, touches the flank of the city center.

With a politician’s optimism, Mr. Finucane pointed out that his own kids have never known their city as a war zone. They don’t get searched and questioned riding the bus downtown. Mr. Finucane won his seat in Parliament in 2019, wresting it from a long line of Protestant, unionist politicians, the last of whom held it for over 18 years.

The election of a Sinn Fein representative in this constituency, where Troubles violence was heavily concentrated, was seen as another bellwether of changing demographics and political sensibilities: The 2021 census found that for the first time, there are more Catholics than Protestants in Northern Ireland. Mr. Finucane is every inch the Sinn Fein politician: He sticks to the traditional republican policy of refusing to sit in chambers or vote in the Westminster Parliament and was harshly criticized by political rivals for speaking at an I.R.A. commemoration ceremony this spring.

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But while the Finucane family illustrates both the repressions and resurgence of the Catholic community, it also demonstrates the slow dawning of a less sectarian island: Unlike his father, John Finucane was not raised in a religious household and does not consider himself a Catholic.

Amid all this change, the Finucane family’s goal has remained steady: a public inquiry, a tribunal similar to a U.S. congressional investigation in its powers and transparency. Mr. Finucane rattled off the shifting responses his family had heard over the years: “First it’s a senseless killing by a paramilitary organization, one of many tragic incidents,” he said. “Then it evolves to ‘There may be a few rotten apples in the barrel, but these are the people holding the line, preventing the civil war.’”

He continued: “Then as that gets debunked, ‘Well, it’s an awful lot of money to throw at one case.’”

“Then finally it becomes, ‘Well, it was a long time ago. It would be very difficult or incorrect to have a judicial process.’” Back in 2002, the British and Irish governments asked a retired Canadian Supreme Court judge, Peter Cory, to investigate and make recommendations on several prominent killings, including the assassination of Pat Finucane and three other cases that involved allegations of collusion by British forces in Northern Ireland.

During Mr. Cory’s investigation, British MI5 officers broke into his office in London, took his files and later wiped his computer disks clean. Mr. Cory, however, had already understood what he was up against — he’d fastidiously been sending backups to Canada by diplomatic courier, Michael Finucane told me.

Mr. Cory ended up recommending public inquiries in all four deaths. He submitted his suggestions to the British government, which was then expected to announce the findings and take action. In three of the cases, including the prison assassination of a prolific loyalist killer, Billy Wright (a.k.a. King Rat), and the fatal bombing of the solicitor Rosemary Nelson’s car, inquiries were duly held.

When it came to Pat Finucane, however, silence reigned. The family pressed; no answer came. “We asked, ‘What’s the recommendation?’” Michael Finucane said. “The British government delayed answering.” Then, one day, Mr. Cory apparently lost patience — he phoned Michael Finucane directly. “He said, ‘I’ve recommended an inquiry in your family’s case.’ I said, ‘Thank you very much, judge,’” Mr. Finucane recalled.

Finally, the government spoke up. Pat Finucane’s case, they said, would be examined under a new law being drafted. This turned out to be the 2005 Inquiries Act. Described by Mr. Cory as creating “an intolerable Alice in Wonderland situation,” the act allowed British cabinet ministers to intervene in inquiries to withhold documents or suppress information. The Finucane family has refused to cooperate with investigations under the act.

Prime Minister David Cameron invited the Finucanes to Downing Street in October 2011. The family had renewed their push for a public inquiry since Mr. Cameron had come into office the previous year, and now they assumed they’d prevailed. Why else bring them all the way to London? They trooped off to see the prime minister — Michael and John, their sister Katherine, their mother and two of their uncles. Perched in an armchair by the fireplace in an upstairs reception room, Mr. Cameron gave the family the news: The British government would engage a barrister to conduct a “review” of existing records but would not conduct an inquiry.

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The news hit Michael Finucane “like somebody had punched us in the stomach.” His mother, Geraldine — who was a middle-class Protestant student when she met her future husband at Trinity College in

 Dublin and who was wounded by a ricocheting bullet during his assassination — turned to Mr. Cameron and ended the meeting. They walked out of Downing Street and found themselves, in various stages of

A man in a black suit stands before microphone with a gray haired man and woman and a blond woman, all with downcast eyes. The Finucane family speaking with the media after seeing David Cameron in

Geraldine Finucane told reporters the family had been “lured to Downing Street under false pretenses.” She later described Mr. Cameron’s investigation as a “sham proposal.”“It represents yet another broken promise by the British government who still fear a public inquiry into the murder,” she said in her latter

John Finucane had just been in the streets of London last January, protesting the legacy bill along with the Bloody Sunday families, when he strode into his Westminster office and jumped onto a video conference. (While Sinn Fein’s members of British Parliament do not take their oaths of office or vote, the party makes use of the office space for meetings and other official business.)

The 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement was coming up, and former Prime Minister John Major of Britain was testifying to the Irish Parliament’s Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement by video link. Mr. Finucane had the privilege to join, and he didn’t want to miss the chance. Mr. Finucane had questions about Mr. Major’s time in the British cabinet. Mr. Major had been prime minister, he pointed out, when British intelligence ran Brian Nelson as an informant and a large shipment of arms arrived in Northern Ireland under what Mr. Finucane called the “watch and direction” of British agents.

Mr. Major was also in the cabinet, Mr. Finucane pointed out, when his father was killed. “On your watch, respectfully, I would highlight that collusion was endemic,” Mr. Finucane said. “Were you briefed on this strategy? And if you weren’t, do you find it strange that you weren’t?” Mr. Major, who had been listening with a fixed expression of somewhat dainty dismay, stuttered a bit as he replied, “I’m surprised.” “I was certainly never briefed on that,” he said. “I certainly wasn’t aware of either of the things you mentioned.” There was something mesmerizing about this exchange. On the night his father was killed, John Finucane was a young boy huddled on the floor, and John Major was in the cabinet of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Now they faced each other in suits, Mr. Major drifting into old age and Mr. Finucane representing the city that was home to his father as well as his father’s killers.

Mr. Major had very little to offer. He said, repeatedly, that he was sorry that bad things had happened, although in an abstract way that suggested no personal role, and that he was sympathetic and — this he said many times — that he wasn’t briefed. Then he began to talk about how long ago it was.

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