

# WALLS OF STONE

WHEN PEOPLE THINK of Ireland, it is usually of a lush green land, with curious sheep, and Guinness. But beyond the tourist idyll lies a burgeoning nepotism, where State corruption and 'stonewalling' ensures the systemic silence of all. Stephen Manning found himself a target – and is now taking the fight to the establishment!

Von CHRISTIAN IGNATZ

Fotos: PAULO NUNES DOS SANTOS

Stephen Manning stands on the windswept coast at Doogort, Achill. The soccer referee has been really put through the mill by the Irish justice system.

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Cover - 06.2007

**Irish referee does time  
for blowing the whistle on corruption!**

*\*Translated and expanded from the original German text of Cicero Magazine, Berlin, August 2017 - see p.12*

**A** ROUGH WESTERLY WIND is blowing that day. In from the Atlantic and across the exposed sandybanks. It scatters clouds and batters against the centuries-old stone walls before sweeping over the Island's football pitch.

Many tourists are drawn to Achill Island in the far north-west of Ireland; to the fresh sea air and the seemingly endless landscape populated by sheep, cows and yet more sheep. But Stephen Manning is not admiring the scenery on this spring day in 2009. He is focusing his attention on the youth football match between Achill Rovers and Ballina Town. Manning is a soccer referee, and today he has his hands full with one particularly rowdy spectator. The fifty-eight-year-old man on the touchline is George Collins, President of Achill Rovers FC, who is making his dissatisfaction with the referee's decisions very clear. In fact, he is turning the air blue with foul language. After a while Manning decides he has had enough. He doesn't make a fuss, but just walks calmly across to the trouble-maker and gives him his marching orders. George Collins departs, snorting with rage and uttering threats against Manning. The referee trots back onto the pitch and resumes officiating. He has no idea of the train of events he has just set in motion.

Little does he know that his life is about to change; that he will soon become a 'targeted individual' the subject of police monitoring, false sexual allegations, and a vicious campaign of online harassment. That Manning's life will be threatened; that an elderly neighbour will be hospitalised after a 'mistaken identity' criminal assault; that all his pleas for justice, and for protection for his family will be ignored, and that ultimately the establishment will even conspire to land Manning in jail.

**Stephen Manning is battling corruption in Ireland. Four years ago, he founded an organisation that has assembled a large body of evidence showing that the police and other State agencies are massively abusing the Irish public.**

**Yet when activists and whistle-blowers turn to the Courts for recourse, they find themselves blocked and obstructed at every turn. This is the story of a seemingly hopeless struggle for justice.**

**M**ANNING IS EVERYONE'S idea of the classic referee. Grey hair, kind eyes and a calm voice. Away from the pitch, he wears a tweed jacket and tie. He returned to Ireland in 2005, bringing his wife and three children with him. He had spent many years living and working abroad. Firstly with NATO in Germany, later as a ski teacher in Switzerland, as a truck driver in Europe and Asia, and as a sports trainer and coach in Alaska. Then he taught English in Japan, where he met his wife Noriko. When the time came to look after his aged parents, he moved back to Ireland. His Ireland. He never imagined that he might one day be sitting in a pub with a pint of Guinness saying: "I was always proud to be Irish, but now? Now I feel ashamed..."

## Political Connections & Smear Campaigns

It all started shortly after the disagreement with George Collins. Manning received a disturbing call from TUSLA, Ireland's Child and Family Agency. According to information received from the Achill Rovers chairman, the referee had been seen 'watching' children in the club's changing room. Manning can't believe what he has just heard. As he soon discovers, it isn't only George Collins behind this letter but also his brother Paul, a distant relative of Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny and a man with a long list of criminal convictions in the UK.

Manning takes legal action against his accusers. But the smear campaign continues. Fake profiles appear on several social media sites proclaiming that this family man is a paedophile as well as a danger to the women of Achill. Offensive texts and harassing e-mails start to flood in, many are anonymous, but some are sent by locals who now believe Manning is a sexual predator. For the next twelve months, Manning's telephone rings several times a day – and throughout the night as well. Threats and abuse spew forth. "Leave the island, or we'll deal with you!" growls a voice on the phone. "Watch out, or you're going to be shot in the head!" Other more insidious threats warn of 'terrible accidents' that might befall Manning's wife and children. Then came St Valentine's Day 2010.

It is already dark when 'John' a pensioner who lives just a short distance from Manning's house in Dooagh village, arrives home after a Valentine's dinner with his wife. As he turns the key he has no cause for concern. After all, this is Achill, in the wintry off-season and about as quiet a place as you could find. But waiting inside in the dark are two heavily-built men wearing balaclavas. "What's your name?" shouts one of them. John shakes with fear. "John," he stammers. "Stop lying," demands the assailant, while the second man ties John's wife up. Then the intruders get to the point: "Stop messing about with women in these parts." They produce studded clubs and begin to beat their victim mercilessly. As they are leaving the house, they have one further message to communicate: "Leave the island, or we'll be back!" The noise has alerted another neighbour. He suspects the intruders might be stealing heating oil and calls the police. But there are no police on duty that evening despite it being a holiday weekend. So, the perpetrators initially make good their escape, a fact that makes Stephen Manning suspicious. Why were there no police on duty? It is only due to the dogged persistence of the neighbour, who, against police advice, stays on the suspects' tail, that they are eventually apprehended. When Manning visits John the next day, he is told in a whisper: "The attack was intended for you, Stephen." After this



Born in 1988, Christian Ignatzi works as a freelance journalist in Stuttgart and Saarbrücken – he was tipped off about Integrity Ireland by a colleague who knows the founder of this NGO Stephen Manning. Ignatzi spent several months researching in Germany and Ireland; met Manning in Dublin; attended a demonstration and wore himself out trying to get responses from the Irish authorities – largely to no avail. His article appears in the August 2017 edition of Berlin's CICERO Magazine and has been incorporated into this report.\*

\* See page 12 for full article source origins.

incident, the Mannings plan to move away from Achill Island. They no longer feel safe. The murder of one of the masked men less than a month later doesn't help either. That crime too remains officially 'unsolved'. When his partner-in-crime is prosecuted, the court hears the unsettling admission that the two assailants had gone to the wrong house. "Then you should have tried harder to find the right house," the judge admonishes him. When Manning reads the account in the newspaper, he is appalled. He goes to the police with his concerns but curiously, they don't want to take a statement. Letters to Ireland's Chief of Police and the Minister for Justice also go unanswered.

This will not be the last time that a state institution ignores his complaints. Over the next six years, Manning will attend innumerable court proceedings where everything it seems is being done to protect the Collins brothers – whether lawful or not. Hearings get repeatedly adjourned, witnesses fail to appear and judges refuse to take any action. The national phone company hires barristers to block Manning's requests for evidence and when he objects, Manning is ejected from Court. He takes matters to the High Court but is blocked and obstructed at every turn there too.

Then, in 2013, TUSLA receives a report from the local police claiming that Manning's daughters had reported that they had been locked in the house, unsupervised, for three days. "That's a complete lie," says Christina Manning, now 17-years old: "Our father has always looked after us well and never did



anything wrong. He always tries to give us the best in life.” Her rebuttals don’t stop the persecution however, and the Mannings face several vexatious appearances in the family courts before having all of the allegations thrown out. But the anxiety and fear of almost losing their children into State care, has taken its toll.

When Stephen Manning thinks back to the time when he was labelled ‘a bad father’ who mistreated his wife and children, the lines on his face reveal the lasting hurt. Manning makes formal complaints about the false reports submitted by the police, but at the local police station, no-one is willing to take action against their colleagues. The only response he receives is from the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC). But Manning has already complained to this same police supervisory authority, in dozens of letters, phone calls and e-mails. However, GSOC answers calls for help with evasive letters, in which they promise to start investigations but then fail to follow through. A GSOC spokeswoman comments: “We are not at liberty to discuss individual cases, but Mr Manning should send his evidence to us.” That is precisely what he did on several occasions, but even then, GSOC did not consider it necessary to take any action. When we ask them why not, we too are met with stony silence. Because after all, they are, “not at liberty to discuss individual cases”.



GSOC was set up in 2008 in the wake of major Garda corruption to replace the discredited Garda Complaints Board. “A toothless dog if ever there was one,” says Leo Varadkar TD (left), current Irish Prime Minister



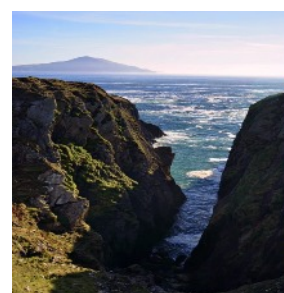
Another year passes before the Manning family gain a partial success. After an emotionally draining odyssey through the Irish Courts—and after another TUSLA investigation is exposed as false—the civil case against George Collins ends with a settlement of €30,000 but most of the award is eaten up by legal fees. All the same, Stephen Manning’s name has finally been cleared. He has however become sceptical after this disturbing string of events. He searches the internet for people who feel they have been similarly mistreated by the Irish State, and finds hundreds of them.



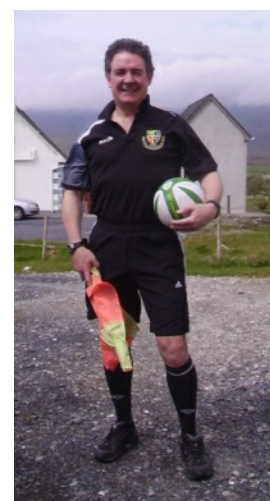
**Top:** Achill Rovers football pitch where Stephen Manning’s nightmare began in Summer 2009.



**Left:** Achill has a proud tradition of fishing.



**Below:** Keel Sandybanks community sports day Summer 2010. The Mannings thought they had found a little bit of paradise on Achill Island.



## JUSTICE, TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

It is mid 2012. The train rattles through the rain-sodden landscape where a heavy mist obscures the ancient stone walls and lush meadows. For the resident sheep and cows it is all very natural. But the group who are meeting in a Dublin hotel that day will be discussing other, far more sinister walls. Walls of denial and deception; walls of silence; walls of dismay. Each of them has had similar experiences. Each had attempted to submit complaints to government authorities against police officers, politicians or members of the judiciary. "It's simply shocking," says Manning. "Every single complaint was backed up by solid evidence, but the authorities either ignored them, or harassed and threatened the complainants, or arrested those who were too vehement in their criticisms of the State."

The group decides to pool their efforts and to found an organisation which they will call 'Integrity Ireland'. Manning launches a website where the group compiles similar cases of corruption within State institutions. The members also plan to organise demonstrations and register their presence at trials. Because the consensus of those early I-I meetings was that Ireland's statutory oversight bodies including the police and the lower Courts in particular had become hopelessly compromised and corrupted. In a process that spanned several decades, said Manning, politically-connected insiders were gifted the top posts in the civil and public service, and from there the gravy train of nepotism and cronyism looked after its own. The appearance of propriety was key to the deception of course, and so Ireland adopted all of the mantras of 'international best practice' without any genuine commitment to justice, transparency and accountability. But then again, this was nothing new.

## THE OBEDIENT IRISH

A brief look at Irish history helps to answer the question of why so many documented cases of corruption and abuse of power remain under the cover of secrecy. The oppression of the centuries has made the Irish a compliant nation. Even under British colonial rule the Catholic Church held its repressive hand over her Irish lambs. Through the 1970's, the Church held a pre-eminent position in the Constitution of the Irish Republic, where 80% of its citizens remain Catholic. The unconditional obedience of the Irish State towards the Catholic Church was incomparable. Until 1973 for example, the import of contraceptives was prohibited. *The Financial Times* considered the island to be the very last country the Vatican truly controlled; that is until 1985 when Parliament decided to release herbal remedies for sale in Ireland - but only with a doctor's note. With this vote the Irish successfully opposed the influence of the Church for the first time in Irish history - a big step for a lethargic society, who hadn't opposed the Church in centuries.



A modest political campaign was launched during the 2016 General Election. Manning contested Enda Kenny's base under the slogan, "Let's elect honest candidates" and "Let's shake up the establishment!"

IN ADDITION to the influence of the Church, the 800 years of occupation by the English also left its mark. The Irish, clinging to that occupying power, had allowed themselves to be conditioned into accepting serious social injustices. Just as today, they repeatedly choose the same old government parties who struggle with corruption in their ranks. "We have long felt the rage," said Brendan Hennessy of St. Vincent de Paul's charity organization in a television interview. "Many politicians are heavily involved in corruption and have nevertheless been re-elected. This is probably due to the impetus in Ireland during the British colonial era."

The broader population isn't necessarily aware of all this however, and corrupt politicians know how to capitalise on this. "We Irish are the easiest to govern," says whistleblower John Wilson. So much so that it's no big deal to silence critics, especially when the State is prepared to use dirty tricks such as character assassination and sex abuse smear campaigns - as with fellow Garda whistleblower Maurice McCabe and activists like Stephen Manning. TUSLA has all the power that the Catholic Church once had. They can come and take your children on a mere premise - without any proofs or evidence - and parents can spend a lifetime in the 'secret' family Courts trying to get them back.

The McCabe penalty points scandal has already resulted in the dismissal of one former Minister of Justice and a former Chief of Police. In May, Prime Minister Enda Kenny resigned. He too had been under pressure for months because of his role in the smear campaign against McCabe - as had Frances Fitzgerald, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice. Both had claimed in parliament that they weren't specifically aware of the accusations - and then had to 'correct the public record'. The new premier is Leo Varadkar: 38 years old, son of an Indian immigrant, conservative and openly gay. There was never such a thing before in Catholic-influenced Ireland, where same-sex relationships were still punishable until 1993.



IN 2014, THE financial crisis hits Ireland with full force – and Integrity Ireland is given a first opportunity to help fellow citizens in dire straits. Hundreds of Irish people are losing everything they own. Every fourth inhabitant of the country has fallen below the poverty line. The courts are repossessing family homes. The local Sheriffs receive a percentage commission from the banks for each expropriation.

In Castlebar, not far from where Stephen Manning lives, the local Sheriff is at the same time a County Registrar (a quasi-judge) and therefore makes a personal profit on every homeowner he dispossesses. “That’s bad enough in itself,” says Manning, who has gathered together with around a dozen Integrity Ireland activists in the local court. “But far worse is the fact that you shouldn’t be trying these cases in the first place.” The Registrar gives a tired smile. But Manning is right. The court system in Ireland consists of five levels. A regional court, such as the one in the small town of Castlebar, can only try repossession cases involving properties with ‘rateable values’ of less than €254 euros. The houses that the banks wish to repossess are for the most part worth a great deal more. By ruling in the banks’ favour, the Registrar is actually in breach of the law. But that does not stop him pronouncing judgement.

Castlebar Courthouse, the scene of multiple assaults on the public and the impetus for ‘common informer’ criminal charges against the County Registrar and attending Gardaí. In September 2015 the accused failed to appear in Court and the lay-prosecutors (Stephen Manning and Colm Granahan) were instead charged with vexatious public order offences.

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This is something else!”

This is classic ‘stonewalling’. The first and last resort of the authorities when they are confronted with their own wrongdoing. In an Ireland riddled with shocking scandals and accusations of endemic corruption, stonewalling has become standard procedure. A closely related tactic is ‘the eternal run around’ where members of the public are either ignored or passed from one government department to another in a seemingly-endless cycle of evasiveness and non-accountability. And if a stubborn complainant still doesn’t get the message, then that’s when the intimidation, the dirty tricks and the smear campaigns kick in.



“What you’re doing here is wrong,” says Manning. “This case can only be heard before the High Court.” But the County Registrar ignores him and summons the assistance of the police. A man who is set to lose his home stands up and demands his rights. “Keep your mouth shut, and sit down!” says the Registrar grumpily. The police set about escorting the activists from the courtroom. At this moment, Stephen Manning assumes his familiar role of referee. In his tweed jacket, he interposes himself between the angry crowd and the police officers. “You must know that you are breaking the law by denying us access to a public courtroom,” he says to the police. They say nothing in reply.

“It is truly shocking the first time you realise that these people, who hold some of the most trusted and important roles in Irish society, are actually exempt from the rules and regulations that govern the rest of us.” says Manning. “It makes an utter nonsense of our Constitution and of our so-called justice system when police, lawyers, judges and civil servants break the rules with foreknowledge and impunity. When the agendas of banks, corporations and other vested interests are prioritised over the Irish public - and even over the rule of law - then clearly, we are not living in a modern democratic republic. This is something else. It is a sorry day indeed when members of the public are silenced and threatened and refused entry into public courts.”

SEVERAL MONTHS EARLIER, Manning had by chance discovered a legal procedure that dates back over a century. He decides that today is the day he should use it. In Ireland, every citizen has the right to bring a prosecution directly before a judge as a 'common informer' without first seeking approval from a state prosecutor. This law had been introduced to make legal recourse available to the less well-off and is still in force today, as various judgments issued by the highest courts in Ireland have confirmed. The lower courts seem either unaware of, or are uninterested in its existence. Or, according to Manning, "they are deliberately and unlawfully resisting it." Nearly a year after the incidents at Castlebar, Manning seeks to bring charges against the County Registrar and the police. But the accused don't appear in court. This causes disquiet in the public gallery as the judge tries to throw out the case after just a few minutes. Some of those present call out, "shame" and "disgrace" and hammer with their fists on the tables as the judge finally abandons the courtroom.

In the coming months, Stephen Manning will be making more appearances in court, including facing several vexatious summonses for alleged traffic offences. After a twelve-month odyssey through the courts, all of the charges are again dismissed, but Manning has sustained serious injuries when he is forcibly ejected from the court by four burly policemen. Surgery and therapy follows, but the injuries persist. Once again, he attempts to prosecute serving police officers for assault. He has several witnesses and CCTV footage. But crucial state evidence mysteriously 'goes missing' and each of the courts he applies to refuses to hear the case. In fact, several judges simply get up and walk out without explanation. Manning sends scores of letters to higher authorities who in turn simply ignore him. But stonewalling as a technique doesn't only apply to Irish citizens. Reporters doing research come up against granite walls. Enquiries to the Garda Press Office go unanswered, and national media shows little interest in these cases. Only the Ministry for Justice responded. They assured us that, 'the Irish Courts are independent and are subject to the law' therefore the Ministry could not intervene. "Anyone who has a problem with Court verdicts can appeal to the Higher Courts," the spokeswoman added. "In any event the Courts are not in the business of discussing cases with reporters."

Stephen Manning's problems meanwhile continue to mount up. He is now being charged with a public order offence during the failed trial against the police in 2015. "This is a another lie," says Manning indignantly, and insists on the publication of the recordings, which are standard procedure in Irish courts. After repeated requests, he receives the recording and then experiences the next setback. The passages that would help prove his innocence have been secretly (unlawfully) deleted. Two years later, the recordings mysteriously reappear in the archives, as the Courts Service confirms to Manning. The judge, however, denies him access to the transcript without stating any reasons. Against arbitrary decisions of this kind, Manning



**Top: Stephen Manning's private criminal prosecution of four Gardaí received coverage in the national press. The case was due to be prosecuted on May 11th but Manning was unlawfully jailed the week before. The Irish Courts Service and the DPP's Office fall silent when asked what has happened to this case?**



**Left: The Aug 2017 issue of Berlin's CICERO Magazine which covers reporter Christian Ignatzi's original story.**

**Below: The 'DIY' book that is rattling the Irish establishment.**



**Prosecution by Common Informer under the Petty Sessions (Ireland) Act 1851**

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You do NOT need to go to the Gardaí

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has no defence. He gathers up all his evidence, and seeks to present it to the High Court in Dublin, but again finds himself rebuffed and obstructed on every occasion.



## SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION

Of course, Stephen Manning isn't the only victim of obstructionism, bureaucratic stonewalling and systemic State corruption. The Irish branch of the global anti-corruption organisation Transparency International reports that 86% of Irish people think that corruption is a major problem within Ireland and 70% think that the government's efforts to combat corruption are not effective. The Irish police (An Garda Síochána) is described as amongst the most secretive and opaque in the western world.

In 2012, the Council of Europe's anti-corruption agency GRECO urged Ireland to implement a number of measures to improve its structures. The country has been plagued with a litany of scandals in recent years involving crooked banks, police corruption, nepotism, systemic child-protection failures and even the sale of illegitimate babies to rich American families. Allegations of judicial misconduct also feature prominently on the Integrity Ireland website, and there is no system of accountability for errant judges. The Emerald Isle certainly does not lag behind other countries in terms of corruption; in international rankings, Ireland is in the same league as Uruguay, Chile and the Bahamas. GRECO is unwilling to reveal the contact details of its officers who are responsible for dealing with Ireland and instead refers us back to the Irish Ministry of Justice.

Members of Integrity Ireland have so far collected details of hundreds of such cases. Membership keeps growing and over fifty thousand have sent their details for inclusion on the database and the main website has registered over 10 million hits. But for the majority of Ireland's jaded population – in a country of less than 5 million – anti-corruption campaigners, activists and whistleblowers are seemingly on a lost cause. Somehow, mainland Europe remains largely unaware of the sordid historical secrets of the Emerald Isle. Of industrial schools, Magdalene Laundries and the mass graves of hundreds of discarded babies. 'Silence' takes on a different meaning here.

Transparency International Ireland do not seem keen to engage either. In response to Manning's call for independent support they reply: "We only support whistle-blowers who have been victimised by their employers." The fact that Integrity Ireland has amassed copious amounts of evidence of corruption within the police and the State is all well and good: "We do not have a big budget," says TII spokesman Donncha Ó Giubhuin. "The only way we can secure the services of a lawyer is via our legal aid department, but this is financed by the Ministry of Justice."

Transparency International did, however, succeed in drawing public attention to one egregious case of corruption. The two police officers, Maurice McCabe and John Wilson had used the organisation's

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*Transparency International Ireland*

anonymous whistle-blower helpline to lift the lid on one of the biggest scandals in Irish history.

In 2012, Wilson and McCabe discovered that police officers in the remoter areas of Ireland were tearing up thousands of speeding tickets. They were appalled by the blasé reasoning for the cancellations whereby friends and relatives of Gardaí, celebrities, politicians and judges were benefiting by getting penalty points quashed. So they decided to pursue the matter and complain to the supervisory authority which then initiated investigations. "So, the police investigate the police," says Wilson. "Obviously,

Garda whistleblowers John Wilson (left) and Maurice McCabe were voted 2014 'Persons of the Year' by the Irish public.



nothing is going to come of that." Instead of a solution being found, Wilson and McCabe began to experience difficulties themselves. The intimidation started. A dead rat was found on Wilson's doorstep. They were no longer allowed to use the police computer system because they had 'allegedly' been illegally downloading internal information. The local judge called Wilson in and berated him sharply. Indeed, he felt so intimidated by this interview that he tendered his resignation from the force and took early retirement.

**'Unfortunately, there is no facility in the Irish domestic arena to enforce E.U. Human Rights Law. But thank you for your interest..'**

*Irish Human Rights Commission*

**A**N EVEN WORSE fate befell Sgt Maurice McCabe. He was accused of having sexually abused an underage female. "Ireland has previous form in this regard. This was an utterly false accusation which was part of an official smear campaign," says Stephen Manning, who, together with John Wilson, recalls the incidents of five years ago and is reminded of his own personal story. Ultimately, there was only one person who took the allegations made by the two policemen seriously – Clare Daly, a member of the Irish parliament. She filed an official complaint about the scandal in parliament – and was arrested the following day. The reason: drunk driving – despite the breath test showing up as negative. "It was a disgrace the way they dealt with her," says John Wilson. After Wilson and McCabe used the whistle-blower helpline, the case had wider repercussions. The fact that the unwarranted arrest of Clare Daly was deliberately leaked to the press by an anonymous Garda was instrumental in this. But ultimately, even the media are part of the conspiracy - or so it seems.

The investigative journalist Gemma O'Doherty, acknowledged 'chief features writer' for *The Independent*, Ireland's largest daily newspaper, uncovered numerous cases of speeding ticket cancellations – and was promptly sacked. The editor-in-chief of *The Independent* had once held the same position on the police magazine. "In Ireland, there is no freedom of the press," says O'Doherty. "Here, everyone is afraid to fight against State repression." But O'Doherty's dismissal was one scandal too many. The media interest became unstoppable. O'Doherty has since received an apology and compensation from *The Independent*, and Maurice McCabe received an apology from the government. The former Minister of Justice was forced to resign because of the false accusations. At the moment, a special judicial enquiry is underway to restore McCabe's reputation.

Stephen Manning and his colleagues can only dream of such an outcome. While the McCabe case is making headlines in the Irish press, there is hardly any inclination to report on what Manning has been going through for years. His evidence of similar smear campaigns against himself and other targeted individuals was recently deemed by the investigating judge's staff to be, "outside of this enquiry's remit."

Manning wrote to *The Independent* after a reporter expressed interest on the phone. The answer to his e-mail? Silence and stonewalling. Why? The Irish journalist is not prepared to reveal that to his German colleagues either. Integrity Ireland is therefore trying to find receptive listeners elsewhere. On a February day, shortly after the announcement of the opening of the proceedings in the McCabe case, they stage a demonstration in support of the whistle-blower in front of the parliament building in Dublin.

**"The problem here is the very close relationships between the media, the police and the State with the result that we journalists cannot do our job"**

John Wilson, Stephen Manning and many of the other victims of the Irish judicial system have gathered there to demand justice. They are carrying green, white and orange posters and blowing whistles. The group of around 20 people standing between locked iron gates and commuter traffic looks slightly forlorn. But that does not concern them unduly. They are at least there and giving vent to their anger and frustration. They include Kathleen Farnan, who claims her child died because of judicial failures and Joe Doocey, whose troubles began when he went out with the ex-girlfriend of a policeman and which culminated in a raid on his cottage where 20 heavily armed officers snatched him half-clothed from his bedroom. The members of Integrity Ireland document, record and write down their experiences, and they turn up day after day at the closed doors of the Irish courts. The clock is ticking and there are deadlines to be met. At any given point, the judiciary can terminate a case for any given reason. Often, the injured parties need documents which are available only to the courts. But court officials find pretexts for not sharing them. Stephen Manning writes e-mail after e-mail, appeals to authority after authority and feels like he's being given the eternal run-around.



Members of Integrity Ireland and A.C.T. (Anti-Corruption Taskforce) demonstrate in support of Garda whistleblowers outside the Irish Dáil.



“This is ridiculous” says Manning. “It’s all being exposed as a great big lie. This isn’t a genuine justice system, it’s just connected insiders looking after their own venal interests at the expense of the rest of us.” Lies, misdirection, delays and contrivances abound and all the authorities he approaches seem preoccupied with de-facto denials and cover-ups. The Irish Courts Service, the DPP’s Office and even high-ranking judges are openly involved, claims Manning, but the Ministry for Justice remains mute and unmoved. Manning shakes his head in dismay. One Court invents fees that are not chargeable, while another sets deadlines that have no precedent. Another posts policemen at the Courtroom doors like bouncers at a nightclub in direct violation of the public’s right to access justice. In short, the Courts themselves are actively facilitating State-sponsored lawbreaking. The Courts have become ‘no-go’ areas for anti-corruption activists and justice campaigners – unless that is, at the wrong end of a criminal summons.

The Integrity Ireland association says it is not specifically ‘political’ but hopes to inform and reform Irish politics by bringing awareness and solutions to the general public. The Association has documented more than 3,000 cases so far. And it is not alone. Groups like Reality Ireland or Land of the Free reach several thousand users in social media networks, as does People’s Internet Radio and Open Your Mind (OYM) Radio. The Hub Ireland also assists struggling homeowners, and new pro-active groups such as the Anti-Corruption Taskforce (ACT) are voluble in their criticisms of open corruption and lawbreaking by the authorities. The Justice for All Group consists in part of parliamentarians, who defend themselves against corruption in their own ranks. Journalist Gemma O’Doherty considers it important that the injured parties join together; “Every whistleblower who has tried to expose corruption in Ireland has been struggling with big problems,” she says.



The Four Courts building under repair. “What’s really needed is reform from the inside.” says Integrity Ireland. “Our justice system is populated with connected insiders whose primary agenda is to protect the status quo. Justice for the general public is a very low priority - if at all.”

THE RECENT JOBSTOWN trial was a perfect example where water-charges protestors were prosecuted for allegedly ‘falsely imprisoning’ a politician in her car. Video evidence proved that Garda testimony was orchestrated and contrived, but no perjury charges are being tabled by the DPP’s Office despite the public outcry. Meanwhile, the prosecution of Seanie Fitzpatrick, arguably the chief architect of Ireland’s banking collapse, descended into farce with the judge directing the jury to acquit because evidence that *could* have had a bearing on the case had been accidentally shredded by the prosecution. What’s the point of having a jury then, one might ask? ‘Accidents’ like this seem to happen all too frequently in the Irish Courts where evidence is regularly lost, misplaced, disappeared or seemingly fabricated at will. “And when the evidence doesn’t suit the agenda” says Manning, “Well, that’s when ‘judicial discretion’ can come into play, and how and when inconvenient evidence gets conveniently ‘deemed inadmissible’.”

“The Courts have now become ‘no-go’ areas for anti-corruption activists and justice campaigners – unless that is, they are at the wrong end of a criminal summons ”

These organisations are flourishing on Facebook and YouTube, which explains the recent mutterings in the Courts about the pressing need to legislate against public commentary of ongoing cases. “But why?” asks Manning. “Isn’t secrecy the real problem here? Courts are supposedly held in public for a reason. They should have nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of. Right now, it’s far too easy for judges to make seriously bad decisions and just walk away from the chaos and destruction they have caused. With a compliant media protecting the status quo, it’s crucial that like-minded people share their experiences on social media and support each other in court. This is still the most important building block in the project,” says Manning: “Until there is some major reform of the system, we need to ensure that people do not face the authorities alone. It’s a tragic fact that if we can’t trust the people who are running the system - then obviously, we can’t trust the system. People have fought wars and revolutions to establish some minimal human rights. We are morally bound to respect that.”

IN THE MEANTIME, it is almost spring 2017. Manning is on his way home after another failed attempt to persuade the Supreme Court to hear his cases. After four house moves within the past six years, he and his family now live approximately two hours from the capital Dublin. At the railway station, three policemen are waiting for him as he steps off the train. "Sorry, Stephen," says one, "but we have to take you in." Manning looks puzzled. "Why?" he asks. "Because you failed to turn up in court today." The local judge had brought forward the date for the next hearing in the contempt case without informing Manning. "They knew I was in Dublin," says Manning "That's why they did this. And they know it's completely unlawful. They have tried me in my absence without any legal representation and without even entering a defence. This violates all of the agreed E.U. protocols on justice. Furthermore, the prosecution has criminally interfered with the evidence and we have brought that evidence to the High Court and posted videos online to prove it. But we might as well be banging our heads against a brick wall for all the results we're getting!"

Manning's fate will be decided one way or another at the Circuit Court hearing in May. "It's ridiculous," says Manning, "This is a form of tyranny. They're just making up the rules as they go along. This is a clear case of conspiracy to pervert justice - and it's being done by people working inside the justice system." But it's no use. His daughter Christina posts a call for help on Facebook after her father fails to come home. "They've arrested Daddy. Please share this post as much as you can," she implores. The next day, he is forced to sign the Circuit Court appeal and lodge a bond before being provisionally released, but a criminal conviction and a jail sentence still hang over him. In the worst-case-scenario, he will have to serve two months behind bars. After that, as time-limits and such come into play, the Courts can safely ignore all of his applications for ever more. And this apparently, is part of the plan, says Manning. "They want to shut me up, and shut us down." But he has no intention of giving up. "The situation is genuinely desperate" he says, "because the rules should apply



Members of Integrity Ireland with Clare Daly TD (2nd from right) outside the High Court. (Above) European Law regarding access to justice is binding in Ireland.

The next morning Manning is brought before the judge in handcuffs. The DPP's Office have sent their Deputy Director of Superior Court Operations and a senior barrister from Dublin, but Manning still has no legal representation. He tells the judge that, "All of this is unlawful Judge; this is blatant political policing and you know it!" Manning argues that the hearing dates were switched unlawfully. But the judge is implacable and visibly agitated. He sentences Manning to two-months in prison. The appeal papers are already waiting to be signed. The next day Manning reads an Order out of the High Court. It had been signed *before* he was arrested off the train. A High Court judge had ordered that, 'the Circuit Court proceedings will go ahead.' But how then did this judge know in advance that Manning was going to lodge an appeal to the Circuit Court the following day? The High Court does not respond.

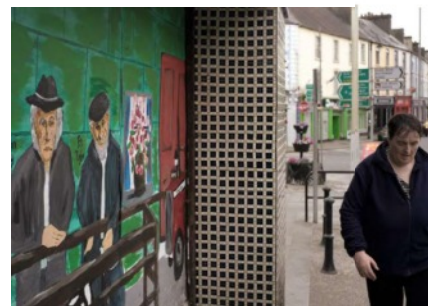
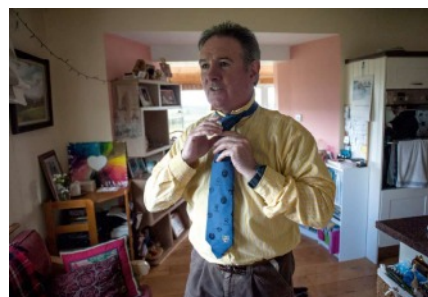
to all of us – not just to some of us. Otherwise we do not have a moral or just society. We need to have confidence in our justice system; otherwise we are all living a lie. If I have to go to jail for this, then so be it! Because when our law-makers become lawbreakers, then someone, somewhere, simply has to blow the whistle!"

FOR FIVE MONTHS Manning badgers the Supreme Court Office with appeal after appeal but meets with the usual obstructionism and stonewalling. He has three main arguments: Firstly, that judges cannot simply walk out on legitimate 'common informer' applications. Secondly, that agents of the State - including police, lawyers and civil servants - cannot commit criminal acts with impunity. Thirdly, that his fundamental human rights must be respected.



The Courts Service insists that he amends his appeal applications before they will accept them. Much of the detail *must* be removed. Months later, the Supreme Court Judges will reject Manning's applications. One of the grounds given is that of 'insufficient detail'. Another is that 'these are not matters of general public importance.' Manning's High Court appeal documents are then officially marked, "Do Not Publish on the Website." This isn't just stonewalling anymore. It is stonewalling by deception and legalese under the guise of 'due process' - but nevertheless, it has the same effect. The protection of the establishment and the avoidance of accountability.

Images from the original CICERO article: The river Liffey and the gates of the Irish parliament, Dublin. Street scene, Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo. Stephen prepares for an Irish Referees Association meeting.



MAY 2<sup>ND</sup> 2017 and Manning arrives at Castlebar Circuit Court for his retrial. He still has no legal representation and has no access to his case file. His requests for disclosure are also denied. Manning informs the new trial judge—who has been specially brought in from Cork—that the proceedings are unlawful, but he is contemptuously ignored. Evidence of collusion, perjury and criminal damage by the DPP's prosecution team is also dismissed. Manning has brought witnesses with him that will not be heard. Instead, the State has organised their own witnesses who are allowed to listen to each other's evidence in spite of Manning's objections. "This isn't a real Court or a real trial," says Manning. "It's a ridiculous criminal farce and a nonsense, and the law says that I don't have to be party to it!"

The outcome was always a forgone conclusion: two months in prison. In the next few days Manning's fellow campaigners leave no stone unturned in their efforts to get him released. A petition gathers more than 1,000 signatures in a few days. Members of other anti-corruption groups make applications to the High Court but all are rebuffed. Stephen writes to the authorities but mail coming in and out of prison is slow, and it is censored. Meanwhile, Stephen's family write scores of letters to politicians begging for assistance. Only one person replies; Clare Daly again. She will do what she can, she says, but holds little hope for a timely intervention from the Minister for Justice. After all, isn't Frances Fitzgerald the very same Minister embroiled in the McCabe scandal - who refuses to sanction errant judges or sack senior police officers who have been proven complicit in serious fraud? The same Minister for Justice who has been stonewalling Stephen Manning and Integrity Ireland for years?

**"We are looking at wholesale, institutionalised hypocrisy. First, they break their own rules with impunity. Then they use criminal tactics against anyone who dares to speak up."**

TOWARDS THE END of May the pressure mounts up and the Prison Authorities arrange early release. Stephen Manning is allowed to go home. In beaming sunshine he stands outside in the garden of his modest house. He looks seriously into the camera and announces his intention of taking his case to the European Courts of Justice. Then his 13-year old son Danny sprints smiling into the frame and grabs his father by the arm. He punches the air and shouts, "Freedom!"

"Freedom!" echoes Stephen.



## AUGUST 2017 UPDATE

Since his release from prison Stephen has written to the CEO of the Courts Service Mr Brendan Ryan seeking confirmation that the audio recordings of Stephen's trial be preserved according to law; whenever a criminal complaint has been lodged.

Stephen has also written to the Director of Public Prosecutions Claire Loftus seeking an explanation for how and why his scheduled prosecution of four Dublin Gardaí for assault and criminal damage on May 11<sup>th</sup> last has simply 'disappeared' off the books?

There has been no response.

A letter to the Chief Justice complaining about the conduct of the judges involved was returned with the response, "*It is not appropriate for the Chief Justice to correspond with you. There is no facility at this Office to complain about the conduct of a judge.*"

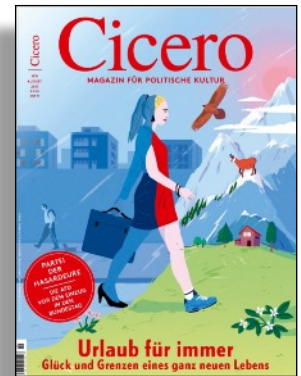
On June 16<sup>th</sup> the day before Stephen was due to be released from Castlerea Prison, the District Court Judge retired. His signature was absent from the prison committal papers.

The Circuit Court Judge who signed off on a false and misleading Court Order on May 4<sup>th</sup> has also been advised of impending legal proceedings and a formal criminal complaint.

Those responsible for the unlawful deletion of audio files and who knowingly committed perjury have been notified of impending 'common informer' prosecutions. They include a Courts Service Manager, a Garda Superintendent and a State Prosecutor.

The rejection of Stephen's Supreme Court Appeal applications is being challenged in the Court of Appeal. This will completely exhaust all domestic remedies.

*Stephen intends taking his case to the European Courts of Justice and is happy to receive genuine enquiries from capable and courageous legal professionals:  
Please email: [legal@checkpoint.ie](mailto:legal@checkpoint.ie)*



*\* This English language article is an amalgamation of information from the original German report by freelance reporter Christian Ignatzi as published in the August 2017 edition of CICERO Magazine; plus additional commentary and photos as supplied by Stephen Manning, administrator of the Integrity Ireland Association who takes full responsibility for the contents of this expanded article, including all of the facts, names, links and details herein. Much respect and gratitude to CICERO Magazine, reporter Christian Ignatzi and photographer Paulo Nunes Dos Santos for their professional efforts and contributions.*

Keim Boy auf Achill-Inland, gelegen  
im äußersten Westen Irlands.  
Die vermeintliche Einfachheit lockt  
jedes Jahr viele Touristen an

[www.integrityireland.ie](http://www.integrityireland.ie)

*One by one - together - we CAN make a difference!*