

Guest Editor's Introduction

Gráinne Kilcullen

Gráinne Kilcullen has an LLM in International Human Rights Law. She worked for Front Line Defenders before taking her current position with Peace Brigades International in Nepal. She has also worked with Amnesty International at the United Nations in Geneva.

I met Pat Rice for the first time in Front Line Defender's main office in Dublin, two days before his death. A few weeks previously, I received an invitation from Pat to write an article for this journal. He was then preparing to guest edit this issue on the Irish dimension to human rights in Latin America. He asked me to discuss the work of Front Line Defenders in Latin America, an Irish based international organisation for the protection of human rights defenders. I responded enthusiastically and it



Patrick Rice with wife Fátima and daughter Blanca at Conferring of Honorary Doctorate at University College Cork, 2008 (Clare Keogh collection)

was from this communication that I was fortunate to have met Pat. As Dermot Keogh mentions in his article on Pat Rice, his life and experiences were not very well known in Ireland, his home country, and I was a clear example of that unawareness. At the time, I had been working in the area of human rights for two years, and I had not come across

the work of Pat Rice. It was not until after his death that I really began to understand his energy and commitment to human rights. It felt strange to be plunged so emotionally into the life of someone I did not know very well.

Our conversation in Front Line Defender's office in Dublin lasted about an hour and we talked a lot about human rights and its philosophy. Pat was returning from his tour in Europe after lobbying for the ratification of The International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which finally came into force five months after his death. During our entire conversation, Pat did not talk about his own experiences

of disappearance and torture in Argentina, or about the extent of his human rights work throughout Latin America. It was not until after I read his testimony that I understood, as much as I could have, the extent of his suffering. Subsequent conversations with his brother, Liam, further connected me to the life of Pat. I felt committed to ensuring that his initial work on the special issue of this journal on human rights would be completed, and within it his work would be honorably reflected. Since getting to know partially the life of a great human rights defender from my own county Cork, Ireland I wanted to tell everybody about him. He has been a great inspiration to me since our meeting and I believe that those who lose faith in human rights or become disheartened by the constant abuses committed throughout the world need only read Pat's testimonies, and descriptions of his life and work, to be reinvigorated and encouraged to do even the smallest acts for the protection of human rights.¹

This issue is a tribute to the life and work of Pat Rice and some of his close friends have thoughtfully described the different stages of that life. In Dermot Keogh's tribute, he brings the reader through Pat's life from university to missionary life, to torture and 'disappearance', up to his final efforts for full ratification of the Convention on Disappearances. It is a poignant piece, yet an essential introduction to Pat's life and character. Justin Harman on the other hand speaks more specifically of Pat's torture and disappearance while he was a junior diplomat at the Irish embassy in Argentina. Justin Harman and his colleagues were instrumental in Pat's release, and his article subtly emphasises the importance of diplomatic pressure in times of crisis. Pat Clarke, another friend and colleague, also wrote a philosophical article on Pat's approach to life, and the importance of recognising the human ability to defy social despondence. Reading about Pat's life and work brought, for me, a rejuvenated focus on the situation of human rights in Latin America and as Mo Hume expresses in her article, *'Never truly defeated': Challenging the Impunity of Violence against Women in post-transitional Central America,* stories like Pat's motivated her to work alongside the struggles of Latin Americans. She talks lucidly about her experiences working in El Salvador and the difficulties in combating violence against women and femicide as both a societal and institutional problem. The lack of trust in the authorities and the prevalent fear among police of reprisal attacks against them all contribute to the weak enforcement of law and lack of protection for victims of violence. However, Hume also talks positively about the work of large women's movements, of which she was a part, combating such abuses and coordinating between the local and national actors in order to raise awareness and organise trainings to change prevailing attitudes discriminating women. The increased national and international law

¹ Copy of Patrick Rice's testimony <http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/78eng/Argentina.2450.htm>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYArAUNu4-o>

established and ratified for the protection of the rights of women have also been positive developments.

Like Hume, Angus Mitchell also analyses the struggles and developments in human rights in Latin America through his review article of Robert M. Burroughs' book entitled, *Travel Writing and Atrocities: Eyewitness Accounts of Colonialism in the Congo, Angola, and the Putumayo*. Although Mitchell criticises Burroughs' lack of analysis of history's use and abuse of atrocity narratives often for political purposes, he speaks highly of the attention drawn by Burroughs to the relationship between travel writing and the reporting of such atrocities. Roger Casement is described as having a large influence on changing the techniques of witnessing; from the romantic idea of discovering and conquering to the actual devastating elements of colonial labour. Casement's experiences in Putumayo in the Amazon drew comparisons to the plight of Irish peasants, and enthused him to advocate for a 'new Ireland' and for the delivery of international justice. Mitchell also states that Burroughs' account of Casement's influence on travel writing emphasises the importance of shifting focus in one's experience and recognising responsibility to human rights wherever one goes.

As all the other articles included in the thematic section of this journal demonstrate, the Irish influence in Latin America with reference to human rights is historically strong and currently dynamic. The work of Front Line Defenders, as well as that of individuals like Pat Rice, Roger Casement, Mo Hume and the support of the Irish Government, is indicative of the commitment among the Irish to human rights, and the added connection to Latin America. Although a generic explanation of shared colonial oppression and subsequent violent struggles for freedom can partly explain the numerous examples of Irish dimensions to human rights in Latin America, what is more important to highlight (and not unique to the Irish) is the patience displayed by all those who work for the promotion of human rights and the belief in the incremental steps taken to improve lives.

I want to sincerely thank all those who contributed to this journal, and for providing a comprehensive insight into the Irish influence in the progression of human rights in Latin America. The work of our Editor-in-Chief, Clíona Murphy, has made this issue what it is today and I want to hereby thank her very much for her judgement, constant assistance and sharp editorial eye. I also want to recognise the difficulty for Dermot Keogh, Justin Harman and Pat Clarke in writing about their close friend, Pat Rice. I believe this tribute and collection of accounts of his life will act as a catalyst for more individuals like Pat to dedicate themselves to human rights.