It’s insane, really, that a private individual should have played a significant role in ensuring, in a little over 16 years, that two SAPS National Police Commissioners have found themselves in the dock accused of fraud and corruption. As former acting National Commissioner, Khomotso Phahlane, his wife and a Pretoria car dealer appeared in the Pretoria Specialised Commercial Crimes court on Thursday, forensic investigator Paul O’Sullivan vowed to continue exposing high-level corrupt cops and other officials who have captured SAPS and who have been running it like a branch of a criminal syndicate. By MARIANNE THAMM.

*Disclosure: Marianne Thamm authored*[*‘To Catch A Cop – The Paul O’Sullivan Story’*](https://www.amazon.com/Catch-Cop-Paul-OSullivan-Story/dp/1431401706)*in 2014.*

Paul O’Sullivan is a *rara avis.* We haven’t seen anything quite like it. The Irish-born South African forensic investigator, who played a not insignificant role in the conviction of former police chief Jackie Selebi, appears to possess a singular focus and energy that feeds off itself. And the more one of his targets pushes back or retaliates, the more determined O’Sullivan becomes, like a gyroscope propelled by its own energy.

Eight years after Jackie Selebi was sentenced to 15 years on charges of corruption for receiving payments from convicted drug trafficker Glen Agliotti, a second top cop has appeared in court on similar charges.

It was Paul O’Sullivan who lodged the original complaint with IPID implicating Khomotso Phahlane in alleged corrupt and fraudulent activities. The directorate at first ignored the complaint. But O’Sullivan didn’t give up. And then, when Robert McBride, who was previously illegally fired as head of IPID by Zuma ally, Minister of Police, Nathi “Firepool” Nhleko, found himself back in the saddle, the game was back on again at full tilt.

It all culminated on Thursday morning when suspended former acting National Police Commissioner Khomotso Phahlane, his wife Brigadier Beauty Phahlane (attached to SAPS Information technology services) and Pretoria car dealer, Durand Snyman, appeared briefly in the Pretoria Specialised Commercial Crimes Court on charges of corruption and money laundering. The charges relate to Phahlane’s alleged kickbacks from forensic supplies companies while he was head of the SAPS forensic division before his promotion to acting National Commissioner.

Durant is in the dock for allegedly supplying the Phahlanes with several luxury vehicles that were allegedly paid for by businessman Keith Keating, director of Forensic Data Analysts (FDA), in exchange for lucrative contracts. Phahlane faces another probe with regards to an R80,000 sound system installed in his home by another SAPS supplier.

The investigation into Phahlane is linked to a much wider probe involving SITA and SAPS and including Keating’s company and amounting to massive alleged fraud totalling around R5-billion.

Some of the details emerged in a remarkable [SCOPA meeting](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-11-30-analysis-sitasaps-capture-scopa-hearing-marks-a-turning-point-as-massive-fraud-uncovered/#.WnyVdGaB00o) in November last year where evidence was produced that Keating had taken SAPS Supply Chain members on a special trip to Old Trafford, home of English Premier Soccer League team Manchester United, six months after an order for equipment worth millions of rand had been placed by FDA.

Phahlane, his wife and Durant were released on R10,000 bail each. The suspended former acting National Commissioner has consistently claimed he is innocent.

O’Sullivan, who settled in South Africa in 1989, is a household name not only because of Selebi but also because of his work helping to take down Czech fugitive Radovan Krejcir, now serving a 35-year prison sentence.

It took years for Krejcir to be arrested as bodies piled up in Johannesburg where the ganglord managed to establish a neat little empire co-opting corrupt SAPS members.

O’Sullivan has been targetted for assassination, shot at, dragged off a plane and illegally arrested and charged (later dismissed) and serially harassed during various raids on his offices in Johannesburg.

In February 2017, lawyer Sarah Jane Trent, Executive Director of [Forensics for Justice,](https://www.forensicsforjustice.org/#home) a non-profit organisation established by O’Sullivan and Trent, was arrested, driven around for two hours and held at an undisclosed police station by a North West detachment of SAPS officers, led by Hawks boss General Ntebo “Jan” Mabula, deployed by Phahlane allegedly to intimidate O’Sullivan.

Shortly afterwards O’Sullivan was [illegally arrested](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-02-14-house-of-cards-osullivan-vs-phahlane-who-will-outwit-outlast-outplay/#.WnynamaB00p) when a convoy of eight vehicles carrying at least 17 plainclothes policemen ambushed him on a road just outside Pretoria. The courts later ordered SAPS to call off Phahlane’s hounds, all of whom are also being investigated by IPID on various serious charges including murder.

O’Sullivan has, for years, been a serial charge layer and has opened cases against Lawerence Mrwebi and Nomgcobo Jiba (NPA advocates who have since both been struck off the roll), Richard Mdluli (former head of Crime Intelligence who was finally fired this year), Prince Mokotedi (former NPA investigator and now head of the Gauteng Hawks), Arthur Fraser (State Security Agency Director General who plays a key role in Jacques Pauw’s *The President’s Keepers*) and several others – and those were only in the Selebi years.

Since then he has targeted a whole new tranche of rotten cops, lawyers and prosecutors.

To say O’Sullivan is irascible would be an understatement. Anyone who has found themselves on the wrong side of the Irishman can attest to the blowtorch of his anger. So too those who have been at the receiving end of his notorious and relentless emails deliberately aimed at back-footing those he believes are sullying the reputation of law enforcement.

His most recent missive was fired off to prosecutor Michael Mashuga on Wednesday night, ahead of Phahlane’s appearance. In an email O’Sullivan warned Mashuga that “any further attempts by you, to protect Phahlane, by bringing false charges of ‘racketeering’ against Sarah-Jane and myself, will be dealt with in the strongest possible terms. Since when does exposing a corrupt Chief of Police amount to ‘running a criminal enterprise’? Since when? As you are no doubt aware, it has always been our contention that you committed fraud, in getting warrants of arrest for myself and Sarah-Jane, an act that you WILLbe held accountable for”.

The investigator accused Mashuga and Phahlane of “acting in common purpose” when they arrested him and Trent and illegally seized their phones. The cops were not looking for evidence they could use against himself and Trent, said O’Sullivan, “but because your accomplices turned over what they found (incriminating evidence against Phahlane, his wife and their accomplices) to Phahlane”.

O’Sullivan has faced tremendous pushback from a clique of very powerful police officials who have used state resources to attempt to silence him. He has also been accused, particularly in his exposing of Selebi, of being “an agent” for MI6 or the CIA, but as author Rian Malan pointed out in*Maverick* magazine in 2008, it is a peculiar agent who behaves in such a provocative manner in public, making headlines almost every week. O’Sullivan, a trained engineer, has never hidden that he did work for the British government in the field of counterterrorism and espionage – particularly in Cyprus – but is contractually bound to secrecy.

There is no doubt that O’Sullivan enjoys the media attention, particularly when a bad guy goes down. There is a photograph of him enjoying a pint of Guinness seated in what once was Krejcir’s favourite restaurant nook.

There are also those who have attempted to discredit the investigator, labelling him “insane”. Mind you, from a certain perspective – you’d have to admit – it *is* rather mad to go around poking heavily armed sociopaths in the criminal underworld with a stick. Be that as it may, O’Sullivan has earned the respect of investigative journalists, cops and politicians alike. He is a meticulous investigator, knows the law and also how to take down a witness statement that will stick. He is able to build strategic alliances with allies and step back when required.

Investigative journalist and editor of *Noseweek,*Martin Welz, described O’Sullivan as an “anarchist”, a man whose unorthodox methods are exactly what is required when dealing with ruthless, unprincipled 21st century criminals and those in the state who enable them.

Most importantly, O’Sullivan has done his criminal work *pro bono*, paying for it from his own pocket for more than 16 years. His costs run into millions which is why he has set up Forensics for Justice with Trent.

Four years ago I spent time with O’Sullivan researching *To Catch A Cop.* I was interested in tapping the mystery of what it is exactly that prompted or drives this relentless mission to root out corrupt cops and officials. Was it religion – O’Sullivan is a devout Catholic – or was it something else?

The closest I came to finding some psychological mother load is that O’Sullivan grew up poor in rural Ireland, the son of a strict colonial policeman who served in Palestine and Malaya. The beginnings of his identity as a good policeman, fighting the bad guys wherever he found them, most certainly can be traced to this childhood.

Asked by*Daily Maverick*on Thursday why he continued to risk his life and spend his own money hunting criminals, he replied, “I think you know the reason why. This country has the potential to be the best country in the world. That potential is being dragged down by corrupt cops, corrupt NPA members, corrupt ministers, a corrupt president and corrupt CEOs of state-owned companies.”

O’Sullivan has “served”, so to speak, under three presidents. His favourite remains Nelson Mandela.

“The dream that Mandela had for South Africa is a dream we all wanted and these thugs came along and in the quiet of night, captured the state’s major entities, such as Transnet, SAA, Prasa and Eskom to service their own greed. The people of this country, having suffered 100 years or more of racial discrimination and state-sponsored divisive hatred, just deserve better,” O’Sullivan told *Daily Maverick*.

It was under Thabo Mbeki’s watch that Selebi, an old comrade and friend, succumbed to the poison of corruption which has since spread like a contagion through the SAPS, so much so that members have been protecting President Jacob Zuma and his enablers and various friends rather than the citizens of South Africa.

“In order to ensure that his family and their accomplices did not face the criminal justice system for their crimes, Zuma hatched a plan in 2014 to ‘capture’ the criminal justice system. That was a bridge too far and I decided, come what may, I would not allow it to happen. My work is not yet done, I still intend to go after Moonoo [Lieutenant-General Vineshkumar *Moonoo]*and a few more generals and ex-generals. I also intend to go after (Shaun) Abrahams and his ‘captured’ colleagues in the NPA,” said O’Sullivan.

The only way to ensure that there would not be a repeat “is to punish them, and to make sure the punishment fits the crime. In my opinion, life in prison is a punishment that fits the crime and will send out the right signal to those planning such a thing in the future”.

The extent of the capture of the State has only recently become evident through a convergence of events, including the #GuptaLeaks emails. When the history of the past 20 years comes to be written, there is no doubt Paul O’Sullivan will feature right up to that moment when South Africa almost succumbed to becoming a full-on Mafia State.

That a private individual has been so integral to this process, prompting and prodding authorities to do their jobs, is absolutely shocking, but there we have it. Cheers, Paul O’Sullivan. Make it a Guinness. **DM**

*Photo: Paul O’Sullivan (Sally Shorkend for Maverick magazine)*