



## Paul Coghlan: Former silk took down gang boss, sex monster priest and crooked cops

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The man in charge of reviewing Victoria's controversial bail system was responsible for flipping a murderous hitman who went on to testify against notorious Melbourne gangland boss Carl Williams.

Today, with his government under incredible pressure following the bloody Bourke Street massacre, Victoria's Premier turned to the cool, pragmatic head of Paul Coghlan, QC. Coghlan was Victoria's Director of Public Prosecutions in troubled times, from 2001 through to 2007, and launched a wave of prosecutions during the state's infamous "Underbelly" gangland war.

The former top silk was also known for reopening the case against pedophile priest Gerald Ridsdale so he could prosecute him with more sex abuse charges, eventually adding 13 years to his jail term.

Coghlan sent down all sorts of criminal figures during a career spanning four decades, but the prosecution of boss Carl Williams, a murderer and drug trafficker, was arguably his biggest scalp.

Victorian state prosecutors had never negotiated a deal with a professional hitman until Coghlan met a man named "The Runner".

"The Runner" was Williams' trusted gun for hire, and Coghlan understood the importance of turning him against a puppet master who issued contracts on the heads of his underworld foes. "He became probably the most important informer in Victoria's history. We took him up to Ballarat so he could plead guilty in secret," Coghlan told [The Age](#) in a 2016 interview.

As well as a reduced sentence, the killer-for-hire had been tempted by, of all things, a vanilla slice.

"I don't think that would constitute a bribe," Coghlan quipped to [The Age](#).

The flipping of "The Runner" would prove pivotal to Victoria's Purana Taskforce, which had been set up in 2003 in response to the wave of Underbelly gangland murders, 36 in all.

Eight other gangland associates would follow the lead of "The Runner" and turn informant.

Although the majority of those 36 murders remains unsolved, Purana Taskforce would oversee the arrest and conviction of Williams and

Even before "The Runner", Coghlan had experience dealing with snitches.

In the 1980s, Coghlan would be a key prosecutor involved in Operation Rock, which had been set up to tackle an international drug trafficking ring importing hashish from Lebanon.

An informant had told Victorian cops that a policeman who went by the name "The Captain" was a central figure in the illegal shipment of 330kg of cannabis resin into Australia.

The top secret operation led to corrupt cop Sergeant William "Dingy" Harris being sent down for

a minimum of 12 years.

Operation Rock also led to the prosecution of six other Victoria police officers on charges of theft and perverting the course of justice.

Anthony Isaacs, a Melbourne-based criminal lawyer, told nine.com.au that Coghlan was an "excellent choice" to scrutinise the state's under-fire bail system.

Dimitrious "Jimmy" Gargasoulas, who allegedly killed five people by mowing them down with his car, was awarded bail six days before last Friday's Bourke St massacre.

"(Coghlan) is a down to earth kind of guy - very practical and fair-minded," Isaacs said.

Another longtime Melbourne criminal lawyer, George Balot, of Balot Reilly, described Coghlan as "a no-nonsense, fearless justice who does not hold back his views."

Balot said Coghlan had just last year delivered a "withering rebuke" of a magistrate who had released violent criminal Stephen Jake Spiteri on bail before he went on to allegedly shoot a man.

Coghlan's decorated legal career almost never was.

After finishing his education at a local Catholic school, he studied medicine for a year at Melbourne University before switching to law.

Coghlan has a deadline of April 3 to provide the government with urgent advice on changes to the bail system.