

# Labor-Rights Lawyer Paid Witnesses And Lied About It, Judge Says



**Daniel Fisher**, FORBES STAFF

*I cover finance, the law, and how the two interact.*

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The judge hearing an Alabama coal magnate's defamation suit against an international labor-rights activist has issued a blistering ruling against the lawyer, accusing him of repeatedly lying about making payments to witnesses and possibly assisting them in committing perjury.

The judge's [50-page order](#) adds a new level of contentiousness in the fight between near-billionaire [Garry Drummond](#) and Washington attorney Terrence Collingsworth of [International Rights Advocates](#). Collingsworth fired first, suing Drummond Coal over allegations the company collaborated with right-wing paramilitary officers to kill union officials trying to organize Drummond mines in Colombia. Those suits have all been dismissed, but Drummond fired back by suing Collingsworth for defamation. The firm also accuses Dutch Oil company Llanos Oil in a separate suit of aiding in the conspiracy by paying one of the witnesses in Collingsworth's case.

In his order released Dec. 7, U.S. District Judge R. David Procter said he will allow Drummond to pierce



the attorney-client privilege Collingsworth has used to shield his dealings with witnesses in Colombia. Procter said there was ample evidence Collingsworth and his former partners at [Conrad & Scherer](#) had misled the court about their payments to witnesses, making it possible for Drummond to invoke the crime-fraud exception to the privilege.



Procter opened by quoting an [old Steve Martin routine on Saturday Night Live](#), in which the comedian urged defendants to use “I forgot” as a universal excuse.

“Defendant Terrence Collingsworth apparently has taken Steve Martin’s advice to heart,” the judge said. Collingsworth repeatedly told the court he was only aware of payments to three witnesses, the judge said, when in fact he’d been paying six all along.

“When he was finally forced to admit more than three were paid, he said, under oath, ‘I forgot,’” the judge wrote. “Quite frankly, this almost comedic response is an uncreditable and insufficient rebuttal,” designed to thwart the application of the crime-fraud exception to the attorney client privilege.

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One of the most startling revelations to come out of the documents so far is that Albert van Bilderbeek, one of the owners of Llanos Oil, paid a onetime Drummond contractor named Jaime Blanco \$120,000, most of it right before Blanco changed his testimony to implicate Drummond executives in the killing of two union officials. Llano had accused Drummond of cheating it out of an oil lease in Colombia.

Drummond’s lawyers suspected Collingsworth had allied with Llanos to harry the coal company and possibly pay witnesses. But in 2011 Collingsworth said the plaintiff lawyers had given witnesses no more than “hamburgers and other food” and paid for their transportation to Alabama. In 2012, Blanco testified that he had received no promises or benefits in exchange for his testimony.