

Not guilty: Jury rejects the politically motivated charge of 'conspiracy'

Duncan Money

Courtesy of British Transport Police and the Crown Prosecution Service, I was recently given an unwanted insight into the British justice system and the frontline of political policing.

Along with 23 others, I was arrested for taking part in a protest against a neo-Nazi gig in South London in 2009. Kept on bail until I thought they'd forgotten about us, we were charged with conspiracy to commit violent disorder.

So many of us were charged that we couldn't all fit into one court room and we were split into two trials. My trial eventually started two and a half years later with nine defendants in total.

Conspiracy is a very useful offence for prosecutors. A conspiracy is where two or more people agree to commit an offence. However, as the chief prosecutor in our trial explained, no actual evidence of an agreement has to be produced for a successful conviction. All they have to do is make inferences from our behaviour that show we must have agreed to a plan and been part of a conspiracy.

Three-week trial

During a gruelling three-week trial this is actually what they tried to do. No evidence was offered that any of us had taken part in any violence. Instead the jury were shown lengthy CCTV footage and asked to make guesses about what we were doing, thinking and saying at certain points.

This would have been laughable if it wasn't so serious. At one point

the prosecutor seriously stated that because I was seen shrugging my shoulders on the CCTV, that must mean I was asking for orders!

The strangest part was how theatrical the court was. Not only do barristers continue to dress up in costumes complete with wigs but the cross-examinations of witnesses and defendants involved dramatic pauses, long soliloquies, barristers throwing their hands up in the air, gasping with pretend astonishment and fuming with pretend outrage.

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There was absolutely no evidence of any plan so the prosecution relied on daft assertions, like anyone wearing a normal baseball cap is trying to hide their identity, and on outrageous political attacks. People who hold socialist views were called old-fashioned extremists who were responsible for the Great Famine in China!

At best, the prosecution had evidence that two people were involved in a fight with neo-Nazis on the day yet they attempted to prosecute 23 people and found the resources to do so. This was a clear cut case of a politically motivated prosecution



Protecting the safety of the bankers in the City of London photo Paul Mattsson

attempting to criminalise political activism.

'Keep up the good work'

Thankfully, after a three-week trial at a cost running into the millions, a jury of 12 ordinary people unanimously acquitted the nine of us after

deliberating for less than an hour. Incredibly, the jury even told us to keep up the good work!

However at a similar, earlier trial seven people were convicted of being part of a conspiracy so it may be deployed again in the future. It forms part of wider attempts by the government to criminalise politi-

cal activity, erode hard-won democratic rights and activists and trade unionists should be aware of it.

As the cuts begin to bite, it is likely that the use of conspiracy charges to round up large groups of activists will be an important tool in the box of dirty tricks to undermine opposition to the government's plans.

Book review Reclaim the Game!

Chris Newby

London Socialist Party

Coming out just days after the chief executive of Liverpool FC announced proposals to keep even more of the money from TV rights for the richest clubs in the Premier League, the timing of the latest edition of John Reid's book *Reclaim the Game* could not have been sharper.

As John says: "For fans everywhere the match is the highlight of the week. When your team loses you are depressed, when they win you are on top of the world. Football has been transformed from the people's game into a multi-billion pound arm of the leisure industry."

This is the first full edition for two years and reflects the growing impact of the economic recession on football. While generally ticket prices have increased dramatically, some clubs have been forced to temporarily freeze or reduce ticket prices to try to get more fans through the turnstiles. John also mentions some reheated plans such as having Premier Leagues One and Two, involving Celtic and Rangers from Scotland, in an attempt to boost the income of the clubs involved in this.

This pamphlet is packed with statistics that highlight the increasing grip of the super-rich on football worldwide. It touches on the pro-

tests in Brazil against the costs to the public at holding the 2014 World Cup while the multinationals rake in profits.

It also shows how fans on lower incomes are being priced out of going to matches as ticket prices soar while players' agents' profits increase dramatically and the top players' wages spiral ever upwards.

There are sections in the pamphlet that deal with racism in football, women's football and the takeover of football clubs by multi-billionaire owners like the Mittal family of John's beloved QPR.

The growing concern that many fans feel about the multi-billionaire ownership of their clubs is shown in this following quote from an Ipswich Town fan on the "Those were the days" fan website about the attempt by the millionaire owner Marcus Evans to buy the freehold to the ground: "The ground should stay in public ownership - then at least there's always a stadium (however dilapidated it gets) into which a club can be formed. I follow ITFC not Franchise Evans."

But football fans have not taken these attacks lying down. John describes the rise of FC United in Manchester and AFC Wimbledon set up by respective fans. There are also fans' movements set up to save their clubs, the latest being Plymouth with fans of different clubs from



Wimbledon FC supporters, rejecting their team being franchised, moved and renamed as MK Dons, have set up Wimbledon AFC

around the country recently taking part in a fans reunited day.

What is different though about *Reclaim the Game* is that whilst many other books on football many describe the role of big business in football, very few it offers an alternative as to how football could be run. There is whole section at the end of this pamphlet both with immediate demands to change how football is

run but also how football could be run under a socialist society.

Reclaim the Game
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