

## One law for the rich?

The 'soft' sentences doled out to the Guinness conspirators at the end of August were widely condemned by the police, the left and the public in general.

The feeling, especially among the police, was that theft no matter how it is perpetrated, should be treated as a serious offence, and that theft of a grand scale warrants a heavy sentence. The left (predictably), see Ernest Saunders' sentence of five years in an open prison, as the 'moneyed aristocracy' letting off one of their own, with a smack on the wrist. Is it true then that in Britain there is one law for the poor and another for the rich? That the Tories look after their own kind, and that the wealthier a man is, the easier he will be treated by the courts? Fortunately, the answer to that question is no. Unfortunately, the proof lies in the shocking mistreatment of Lorrain Osman, a member of the 'ruling class' now in his fifth year of imprisonment, still unconvicted of any offence.

Lorrain Osman was educated at Cambridge and trained as a barrister. A wealthy man in his own right, he was the non-executive director of Bumiputra Malaysia Finance, a Hong Kong-based Malaysian bank. In 1983, the Carrian group, a speculative property developing company, went into liquidation leaving massive debts. This was due to a stock market collapse precipitated by bellicose pronouncements from Beijing after Mrs Thatcher's 1982 visit. Many other companies also went under.

As a result of this, Lorrain Osman was arrested and charged with accepting bribes of some \$12 million to facilitate BMF loans to Carrian. However, the 'evidence' against Mr Osman is tainted, to put it mildly. The state prosecutor in this case was himself recently sentenced to eight years imprisonment for corruption, while the 'star' prosecution witness is a man who



has admitted accepting bribes and been given Crown immunity on condition that he testifies against Mr Osman.

In addition to this, the governments of Britain and Hong Kong are suppressing over 150 documents on this case which, if they were made public, could clear Mr Osman's name. Unfortunately, these documents would also embarrass the government of Malaysia, so they will not be welcomed.



Members of both the Upper House and the Commons (including many Conservatives), academics and public figures, have expressed grave concern over the continued imprisonment of Mr Osman who has been detained in Pentonville Prison since his arrest in December 1985. If Mr Osman loses his fight against extradition he will be returned to Hong Kong where, after a show trial, he will undoubtedly be convicted. And not one day of his detention in Britain will count towards any sentence he receives there. As Mr Osman is 59 years old, he will die in prison.

Please write to David Waddington, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher telling them of your concern, asking that Mr Osman be released immediately and an undertaking be given by the Home Office that he will not be returned to Hong Kong.

Please sign our petition.