

It's a Pity He Didn't Drink Guinness

Last month, Ernest Saunders was goaled for five years for masterminding the Guinness/Distillers shares scandal.

Leaving aside the controversy surrounding this case—in particular the claim of Mr Saunders that he is totally innocent, and that of his son that he is being made a scapegoat—it is generally agreed that the sentences handed down to the Guinness conspirators were “soft.”

Ernest Saunders will in all probability serve no more than two years in an open prison, his co-defendants considerably less. The police, investors and the public at large are of the opinion that this is a case of the Tory “establishment” looking after its own—one law for the poor, one for the rich. Fortunately, this is not the case; unfortunately, the proof of this lies in a shocking case of injustice to another well-heeled member of “the ruling class,” 54 year old Lorrain Osman.

Lorrain Osman is a Cambridge graduate, trained barrister and former non-executive chairman of a Hong Kong-based Malaysian bank. In December 1985, Mr Osman was arrested on a warrant issued by the Hong Kong authorities; a warrant which was subsequently ruled defective. Since his arrest, Mr Osman has been in Pentonville prison where he is fighting extradition. Like Ernest Saunders, Lorrain Osman is facing corruption charges; like Ernest Saunders, the principal witness against Lorrain Osman is a man who has been given

immunity from prosecution. In this case, a man who is by his own admission, a fraudster. Unlike Ernest Saunders, Lorrain Osman has not been granted bail, will not be granted bail, and will continue to be detained in Britain until he is either extradited to Hong Kong or dies.

Yet this need not happen; Lorrain Osman could be freed tomorrow on the order of David Waddington. And, it should be remembered, that not only has Mr Osman never been convicted of any offence, but he has already served the equivalent of a thirteen year sentence with parole.

It should also be pointed out that Mr Osman has always maintained his innocence and that the Hong Kong authorities have consistently blocked the release of documents that could clear him of the charges that have been laid against him.

In this case, the Tories have no need to defend themselves against charges of operating an old boy network. But the continued imprisonment of Lorrain Osman in a far worse scandal than the whole of the Guinness affair; from the 'fixing' of share price to the 'soft' sentences handed out to the defendants. It is also a blot on civil liberties in this country, and one which brings little credit on the current Tory administration.

We urge you to petition the Home Secretary, David Waddington, for the release of Lorrain Osman now.