

The Facts About The Nadir Case

Because of the large amount of publicity generated by Asil Nadir's trial and conviction, I have had many questions concerning my involvement in the whole process. Some are from those simply trying to damage me and my campaign by making wild and untrue allegations; others, I guess, are simply keen to be reminded of events which happened almost twenty years ago. I repeat that I have nothing whatsoever to hide, or of which to be ashamed. But perhaps it is simplest to set out the whole rather complex story here, so that all who wish can read and judge for themselves.

I was approached in September 1991, when I was a backbencher, by a constituent who was an adviser to Mr. Nadir. I met him and was deeply concerned by what I heard about the conduct of the Serious Fraud Office and the Metropolitan Police in handling his case. As a result I went to see the Attorney General, Sir Patrick Mayhew, then wrote to him outlining my concerns. He replied acknowledging that mistakes had been made, but maintaining that otherwise he was satisfied with the conduct of officials

In May 1992 I was appointed Minister of State for Security in Northern Ireland. Sir Patrick was promoted to the cabinet and became my boss.

Towards the end of 1992 I was contacted again by Mr Nadir's leading counsel, Anthony Scrivener QC, then Chairman of the Bar. He told me that allegations had been made in Court of a conspiracy to bribe the judge, and then of a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice involving himself, the Judge, Mr Wyn Jones an Assistant Commissioner of the Met and Mr. Nadir. He was shocked and outraged that such an allegation had been made, and so was the judge.

I spoke to Sir Patrick, told him the story, and asked if it was proper for me to raise the matter with the new Attorney, now that I was a Minister. He replied that it was perfectly proper, provided that I complied with the code of conduct for ministers. I then met Sir Nicholas Lyell, the new Attorney, and an exchange of correspondence followed.

All of this was not before the public and the press, because the judge made an order preventing reporting of any of these matters. They only became public after my resignation, when I reported these matters to the House in my resignation speech.

As a result, an internal inquiry followed and the following events occurred. The case officer - Mrs Lorna Harris, a qualified solicitor and therefore an officer of the court - was disciplined, punished and removed for unacceptable conduct. She was found to have failed to tell the truth to both Attorneys, thus causing them inadvertently to mislead me and the House because she had given them false facts. During the recent trial she was found by the trial judge to have committed perjury in her evidence to the court.

But that is not all: a Chief Superintendent of the Met took early retirement because of his misconduct; and a senior official of the Inland Revenue, Mr Allcock, who had on behalf of the Serious Fraud Office leaked the letter from the Attorney to me which led to my resignation, was later tried and sentenced to five years' jail for corruption.

Throughout this whole saga I never made any assertion whatsoever as to Mr Nadir's innocence or guilt. My only concern was the behaviour of the authorities.

Many have said – particularly a scurrilous and mendacious journalist recently in an attempt to damage me – that I was ‘a character witness for my friend the tycoon’. He and others should know that a character witness gives evidence after a conviction and before sentence. I was called to give evidence solely about the matters I have referred to above. The transcript, which is a public document, will show that I was not asked about, nor did I refer to, Mr Nadir’s character.

Finally, the Prime Minister wrote to me on 24th June, 1993, when I resigned. The letter was published at the time, but I repeat some extracts to refresh memories:

“. . . I fully accept that you acted with complete propriety in raising Mr Nadir’s case . . . I have no criticism of your actions . . . I am sorry that you had to stand down . . . in circumstances like this. But I am sure that you took the right decision with your usual sense of duty.”

I am content to abide by that judgment.

Michael Mates
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