

A CONVERSATION WITH BARRY SHEERMAN MP

Q: You are Barry Sheerman MP; you are.....

A: [I am opposition] spokesman for Home Affairs: police, prisons, crime prevention.

Q: You're a lawyer?

A: I'm not a lawyer; I'm an economist.

Q: How long have you been concerned with the case of Lorrain Osman?

A: Since his solicitor brought the case to my attention; I'd say roughly nine months.

Q: Who was that?

A: Mike Kingston.

[Michael Kingston is not actually Mr Osman's solicitor but is a legal consultant specialising in extradition law. He has been acting for Mr Osman for nearly four years.]

He brought it to my attention; I've asked dozens of parliamentary questions on the case; I've brought it up by personal letter, both to Douglas Hurd when he was Home Secretary before he went to Hong Kong; and to Douglas Hurd when he became Foreign Secretary when he went to Hong Kong. I've been trying to put the pressure on.

Q: What sort of questions have you been asking?

A: .....about how long Lorrain Osman has been in; how many other prisoners in recent history have been in anything like that long. [I've been] keeping the pressure on the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor to try to highlight the fact that this is a gross injustice.

Q: I'd agree with you there one hundred per cent, but there are those who say Mr Osman has brought this [his continued internment] on himself. What do you say to that?

A: Firstly it [his imprisonment] goes against all common decency and rule of law that this should have happened. And I've certainly been convinced by the campaigners for Lorrain Osman that it is right, even [considering] the sort of sentence he might have received, he's served that and over, probably double that.

Q: What would you like to see happen in this case?

A: I think the Home Secretary has the ability to move in and release him, then I think the system would resolve itself. As far as I understand, Lorrain Osman has been frightened to go back to Hong Kong because he doesn't think he would receive justice there.

Q: Could the Home Secretary release him just like that?

A: He has the ability to do so, yes.

Q: What has been your response from the Home Office?

A: Very negative.

Q: Can you qualify that?

A: They're always arguing that it is Lorrain Osman's own decision to fight extradition that results in stopping him going back to Hong Kong and having the whole thing resolved. They evade the question that the basis of his unhappiness is that he doesn't think he would get justice if he went back to Hong Kong. He's in a Catch 22 situation.

Q: Do you think there's been some sort of conspiracy against him?

A: I've no evidence for a conspiracy; I don't know that much about the background to his case in Hong Kong. I don't think there's been a cover up involving the British government, but then I don't have the full information on that; I think other people might.

Q: Recently I spoke to an MP who told me he could do a deal if he went back to Hong Kong. [Indeed, Lorrain Osman himself has claimed he has been offered such a deal. See Lorrain Osman Speaks]. He said that the Hong Kong system of justice isn't that bad. But Lorrain Osman says he will not plead guilty.

A: That's right. I'm not criticising the Hong Kong system of justice; all I am saying is that for his own reasons, Lorrain Osman doesn't think he would receive a fair trial.

Q: What do you intend to do about this case now?

A: I shall carry on the pressure; I will talk to the legal advisers to Mr Osman and take legal advice from them [as] to how we can keep up the pressure on the Home Secretary to do something about this scandal.

A: Barry Sheerman, thank you very much.