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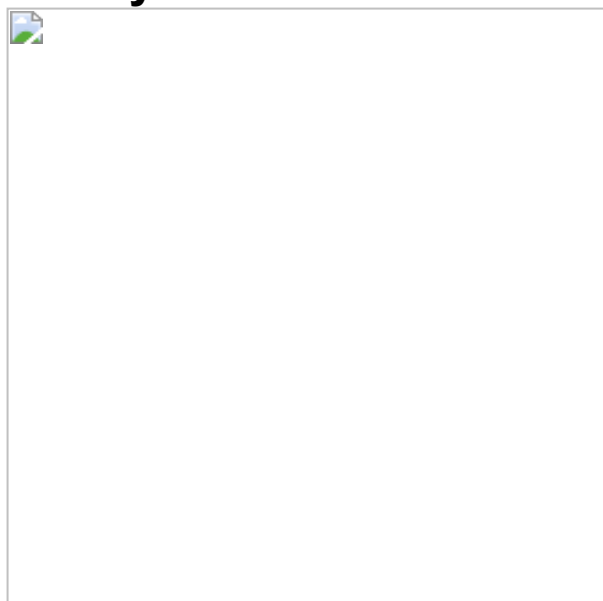
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UK

'Abysmal failure' as man falsely accused



More trouble for the Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has been accused of having a "cavalier attitude" in dealing with an alleged rape in which an innocent man was almost jailed for life.



[BBC Home Affairs Correspondent Jane Peel reports on the case](#)

Judge Barrington Black ordered that the government prosecutors pay £5,000 towards the costs of what he called an "horrendous episode in the courts of justice".

The CPS has already been severely criticised this year by an official report.

Oliver Thompson was accused of rape by a woman who claimed to have been given drugs and alcohol by him.

She said she had never encountered illegal substances before and had no drink problem.

But a psychiatrist's report sent to the CPS said this was untrue - she was dependent on a number of drugs.



The case got as far as the Old Bailey

Referring no doubt to coverage of miscarriages of justice, he said it could easily have seen television cameras on the steps of the Court of Appeal with "tears of recrimination being cast in all directions".

Mr Thompson, a 34-year-old labourer from Stonebridge in north-west London, was accused last year of raping and falsely imprisoning a 20-year-old woman, plus indecent assaulting her and causing grievous bodily harm.

The Old Bailey jury picked to try him in January this year was told he had met his alleged victim in a London pub.

The Crown claimed he bought her drinks, smoked cannabis with her and then took her back to his flat and attacked her.

Thompson who had never been in trouble with the police before, was picked out in an identity parade by the woman.

Following the attack she told a psychiatrist that she was dependent on "crack cocaine, opium, hash and Ecstasy", and admitted to "increased alcohol abuse".

Judge Black pointed out that this was important evidence, which the defence should have been told about.

'Fiasco'

Even a senior CPS lawyer, sent along to apologise to this special hearing at Harrow Crown Court and to the defendant, described the situation as a "fiasco".

As leader of the CPS team, Alex Segbefia accepted "full blame" even though he was on holiday between the letter arriving in his office and Thompson's trial.

It appeared that an office discussion had resulted in a decision not to send it to defence counsel.

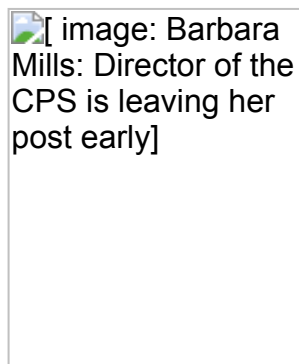
The decision was not even checked with a prosecution lawyer, although this was also supposed to have taken place.

What had happened was an "abysmal failure".

The court was told by another lawyer that the CPS was "understaffed and overworked", but she admitted "it should never have happened, it is regrettable".

The hearing heard Mr Thompson had not only had to face the "pressure" of the original trial but also a second abortive attempt at Harrow after which the prosecution dropped the case.

Fortunately he had spent little time in custody after being granted bail.

 [image: Barbara Mills: Director of the CPS is leaving her post early]

Barbara Mills: Director of the CPS is leaving her post early

leaving her post early.

This prompted the judge to observe "thank heavens for small mercies".

The defence counsel added: "From Mr Thompson's point of view a miscarriage of justice did not in the end occur, but it very nearly did occur."

This latest controversy follows a series of problems for the CPS, whose director Dame Barbara Mills is

A recent report into the workings of the service concluded that it had not achieved the improvements expected when it was set up in the 1980s.

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