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Judge refers doctors, priest and Olympic Gold medalist to Attorney General over alleged contempt of court



Photo credit: AC

In a dramatic escalation of tensions over the role of juries in criminal trials, a Crown Court Judge has referred 24 people, including doctors, a priest, an Olympic Gold medalist, a retired Detective Sergeant and a former Government lawyer, to the Attorney General for contempt of court for holding up signs outside court. If prosecuted and convicted the 24 could now face up to 2 years' imprisonment. Others have been informed they could be charged with perverting the course of justice for posting similar signs, an offence which carries a maximum of life imprisonment.

Over [2 days in May](#), the group sat quietly outside Inner London Crown Court holding placards which read: "*Jurors have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to their conscience*". The statement reflects a centuries-old principle of British law (which is displayed in marble by the original entrance to the Old Bailey). The context for the action is an increasing pattern of campaigners being banned both from explaining the reasons for their actions when prosecuted and also from informing juries of their right to make decisions on their conscience. Already a number have been [jailed just for using the words "climate change" and "fuel poverty"](#) in court. And when Trudi Warner, a 68-year old retired social worker, held up a similar sign outside Inner London Crown Court informing jurors of their right to make decisions of conscience [she was arrested](#), sent to the Old Bailey and referred to the Attorney General.

Initially, it appeared the solidarity action by the group of 24 had passed without incident. Although they handed [a letter](#) in to the Judge, Judge Silas Reid, informing him of their presence, no-one was arrested at the time, no-one was asked to move and no-one was asked to remove their signs. But it has now emerged that Judge Reid has [referred the group to the Attorney General](#) too.

The Attorney General, The Rt Hon Victoria Prentis KC MP, now faces a dilemma. If she declines to prosecute the 24 she risks undermining the authority of the judges who have been banning campaigners from explaining their motives to the court. She will also be giving the green light to informing the public of a jury's right to make a decision on their conscience, whatever the judge directs them to do. But if she does commence a prosecution she may inadvertently shine a spotlight on the highly contentious issue of judges seeking to suppress one side of the story in jury trials.

Revd Dr Sue Parfitt, a priest and retired psychotherapist, and one of the sign-holders, said:

“It’s a serious matter indeed if a jury feels unable to make decisions according to their conscience, just as it confounds the basis for the law in this land when defendants are prevented from telling the whole truth in court. Both rights must be defended.”

Tim Crosland, the former Government lawyer, and another of the sign-holders, said:

“A [recent report](#) revealed that the top City of London law firms have supported nearly £1.5 TRILLION worth of fossil fuel transactions since 2018, money which infiltrates the legal system as a whole. Maybe that explains why judges aren’t trusting juries to decide who are the real criminals here?”

ENDS

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Images and video available here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_gKCO-7Jt6OiTfYEibwIQHdKHTytkm4M?usp=sharing

High quality stills available here:

<https://show.pics.io/xr-global-media-breaking-news/search?tagId=6460eb51206fd1000d1da161>

Notes to Editors

Press Release Monday 15th May Inner London Crown Court:

<http://insulatebritain.com/2023/05/15/breaking-high-noon-at-crown-court/>

Principle of Jury Nullification: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jury_nullification

Trudi Warner arrested:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/04/climate-activist-trudi-warner-held-sign-telling-jurors-act-conscience-charged>

Cathy Eastburn, Sally Davidson and Oliver Rock arrested: https://youtu.be/GQxVU_JIB0E

Letter notifying Judge Reid 15th May:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PRA-kYmXcr1yKu1MSsybRFE4Tc4EBulgPSYlav3UqRM/edit>

David Nixon jailed:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/07/insulate-britain-activist-david-nixon-jailed-for-eight-weeks-for-contempt-of-court>

Amy Pritchard and Giovanna Lewis jailed:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/activists-jailed-for-seven-weeks-for-defying-ban-on-mentioning-climate-crisis/>

“Protestors must be allowed to explain motives in court” Times article:
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/protesters-must-be-allowed-to-explain-motives-in-court-zhpg2g3gs>

Old Bailey plaque (see below):

