

Latest Welsh political trial

After ten weeks in a Cardiff courtroom, the latest Welsh conspiracy trial ended with four of the defendants being found not guilty. Nicholas Hodges, Adrian Stone, David Burns and Robert Griffiths go free. Veteran anarchist Dafydd Ladd pleaded guilty to explosives and impersonation charges so that all charges against his sweetheart Jenny Smith be dropped, and he goes down for nine years. John Jenkins, former Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru member and a political analyst of considerable reputation, pleaded guilty to helping Dafydd Ladd evade arrest and was given two years. Brian Rees was found not guilty of conspiracy but received three years for possession of explosives. Gareth Westacott jumped bail and has not yet stood trial.

RESOLUTION FOLLOW-UP

At last year's A.G.M. the Celtic League resolved to express to the Home Office its extreme concern about the increasing practice in Britain of treating suspects as guilty persons before any court of justice had found them to be so. Special reference was made to the case of conspiracy to cause explosions which was about to be heard in the Crown Court at Cardiff. Here are the details of the verdicts arrived at in that trial.

Nicholas Hodges, aged 22, was found not guilty on all charges. He had already spent ten months in jail awaiting trial before being released on bail.

Adrian Stone, aged 23, was found not guilty on all charges. He had spent six months in jail before being released on bail.

David Burns, aged 25, a history graduate at Aberystwyth who stood in the Gower by-election as a Political Prisoners candidate, was found not guilty on all charges. He spent 9 months in jail before being allowed bail.

Robert Griffiths, aged 31, a former research worker for Plaid Cymru was found not guilty on all charges. He had spent four months in jail before being released on bail.

Brian Rees, aged 30, a psychology graduate was found guilty of possessing explosives, but not guilty of conspiracy. He was found guilty of possessing explosives, but not guilty of conspiracy. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment.

Dafydd Ladd, aged 33, who was born in Hamburg, pleaded guilty to 2 charges of possessing explosives and a false birth certificate and passport. He was sentenced to nine years imprisonment.

John Jenkins, aged 50, a social worker, pleaded guilty to sheltering Dafydd Ladd. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

Jenny Smith, a 29 year old nurse, Dafydd Ladd's girl friend, had been released after fourteen days without being charged.

Gareth Westacott, aged 29, who spent nine months in prison before being allowed bail, disappeared before the trial.

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GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT?

When the jury of seven men and five women re-appeared into a tension-filled Cardiff Crown Court, seven Welsh republicans stood in trepidation as to their fate. Would the Law of England doom them to rot in an overcrowded prison cell? That day in November, there were cries of joy as four of them walked away free men once again. This was the termination of an extensive and expensive ten week trial of the alleged members of the Workers Army of the Welsh Republic (WAWR). That group had allegedly been responsible for a wave of bombings in Wales and England during 1981 and 1982.

Of the three not released, Dafydd Ladd was jailed for nine years after admitting to the possession of explosives and holding a false passport. Brian Rees was found not guilty of conspiracy, but guilty on a charge of possessing explosives, and was jailed for three years. John Jenkins, who spent most of the seventies in a high-security prison for his role as leader of the now defunct Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru, was jailed for two years for helping Ladd to resist arrest.

Jenkins' sentence did seem particularly harsh, but ironically enough, not as harsh as that of those who walked free. Those four young men had been held behind bars for between four and ten months before being allowed bail. They had, in effect, been assumed guilty before their trial. The police brought a great deal of "evidence" against them, including the use of forensic experts. There were

accusations during the trial of the police manufacturing evidence, even producing false statements in the defendants names. It was also alleged that they attempted to implicate the name of the Plaid Cymru Member for Meirionnydd, Dafydd Elis Thomas. It is a shocking indictment on the police, but perhaps a little praise to England's law system (which is the one enforced in Wales), that the jury apparently believed the accusations against them, dis-believed the "evidence" offered, and completely exonerated the four defendants. However it is but a tiny step to an extension to the Emergency Powers legal system, where people can be found guilty without facing a jury. A fifth defendant, Jenny Smith, had been released a fortnight into the trial after all charges against her were dropped. She also had been imprisoned for several weeks pending bail. Gareth Westacott spent nine months in prison awaiting bail. He disappeared a few days before the start of the trial.

In the aftermath of the trial, which cost the taxpayer £500,000, one must wonder to what extent are the police willing to allow themselves to sink in order to "nail" any political opposition to the present order.

Anxiety has been expressed in many quarters not only at the way in which defendants who were subsequently found not guilty had been held in custody for several months before being brought to trial, but also about their allegations that the police had planted evidence, invented false statements, and mal-treated the

defendants.

The case has left Wales in confusion. Why were members of the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement singled out for arrest and imprisonment without trial, for periods ranging from a few weeks to seventeen months? Why did interrogators try to induce defendants to implicate Meirionnydd M.P. Dafydd Elis Thomas in the alleged conspiracy? Who is really behind the bombing and arson campaigns? How did Gareth Westacott, supposedly a dangerous man obliged to report daily to police, suddenly manage to disappear? Above all, who pushed the Welsh police into bringing such an ill-prepared case with so little hard evidence? Socialists, republicans, nationalists, civil rights campaigners, and the rest of the public are anxious for answers.