

Killer On The Loose

In June 1987, British-born Asian Satpal Ram was gaoled for life for murder. The previous November he had stabbed to death an innocent man in a drunken frenzy over a trivial dispute about the background music being played in an Indian restaurant. Ram's appeals were dismissed by the Court of Appeal in 1989 and 1995, but he and his supporters would have none of it. From his prison cell, Ram orchestrated a campaign of lies and hatred against both his victim, Clarke Pearce, and his family, some of whom were present when the crime was committed. Ram claimed he was the victim of a - bore, bore - racist attack acting in lawful self-defence; his victim had died only because he refused to be treated by a woman doctor, the police bungled the investigation, Ram's barrister was incompetent, etc and ad nauseum. Stories about "race attack victim Satpal Ram" filled the *Guardian*, *Socialist Worker*, the Asian press and cyber-space. Such was the sheer volume and potency of these lies that not only were celebrities duped but so was Parliament. And the Parole Board. But Home Secretary Jack Straw was not, and when the Board recommended Ram's release (in October 2000), Straw vetoed the decision.

Subsequently another life sentence prisoner won an important test case in Europe which resulted in Straw's "political interference" being ruled illegal. In June 2002, still protesting his innocence, Ram was paroled, laughing at the authorities as he was awarded £20,000 damages after his successful legally aided Judicial Review of the Home Secretary's decision.

So Ram's tale might have had a half-happy ending, for him if not for his victim. On his release he gave a press conference, and in spite of bearing the appellation "convicted murderer" he could have done something meaningful with the rest of his life. Alas, there was to be no happy ending for poor, persecuted, oppressed Satpal. Ram had brought another (obviously frivolous) legal action, for personal injury, and when he withdrew this, the costs were set off against his award, which left him with a mere thousand pounds. That is still a lot more than a humble prison discharge grant, so he should have been thankful. But it wasn't long before poor, persecuted, oppressed Satpal was in deep water again. Less than a year after his release he was accused of assault and criminal damage; he disappeared, and on April 24 last year, the Probation Service recommended he be recalled to prison. His life licence was revoked on May 7, but the authorities were still prepared to pay him the outstanding thousand pounds, provided he surrendered to the police.

Incredibly, Ram contacted his solicitors and demanded payment whilst on the run! He was again granted Legal Aid, and his case argued before the High Court. On January 12 this year, Mr Justice Crane threw out Ram's claim. He is still at large. And penniless.

Shortly after he murdered Clarke Pearce, the British-born Ram tried to obtain a passport to flee the country. We can only hope that this time he has been successful, and will seek asylum in a country free of the taint of *racism*, liberated *Zimbabwe* perhaps?

In the wake of these developments, Ram's one-time so vocal supporters have been curiously silent. It has now been over seven months since his licence was revoked, and the only report of the case was published by *The Scotsman* after Mr Justice Crane handed down his decision.