


MP seeks review of 50 legal 'miscarriages': Home Secretary asked to set up independent tribunal to investigate possibility of wrongful convictions

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Jason Bennetto

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A DOSSIER containing details of dozens of cases of alleged miscarriages of justice will be presented to Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, today.

The information, much of it previously unpublicised, has been selected from hundreds of cases presented to the Labour MP Chris Mullin following his campaigning role in the release of the Birmingham Six in March 1991. Mr Mullin will call for an urgent independent review of the material.

The Home Office will receive details of 43 cases. A further four will go to Ian Lang, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and three to the Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr Mullin is particularly concerned that many of the convictions are based either on statements extracted in police custody or admissions allegedly overheard by cell-mates. 'This second feature of controversial convictions has not previously had the attention it deserves,' Mr Mullin said.

He added: 'I do not put my hand on my heart and say that all these people are innocent. Only that there is a good case for a detailed review. This ought not to be left to MPs or even journalists. What is needed urgently is an independent review tribunal along the lines recommended by the recent Royal Commission.'

Mr Mullin and his assistant chose the most deserving cases to give to the Home Secretary. He will press Mr Howard tomorrow to refer for appeal the case of the Bridgewater Four, jailed for murdering the newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater in Staffordshire in 1978.

The establishment of an independent authority to review alleged miscarriages of justice was the key recommendation made last month by the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice.

The cases highlighted in Mr Mullin's file include:

Satpal Ram, who was sentenced to life for murder for stabbing a man during a fight at a restaurant in Birmingham in 1986. Ram claims he was acting in self-defence after he got into an argument with a group of six white men who were making racist comments. The victim, who had been drinking, smashed a glass over the head of Ram who then stabbed him. Two appeals have been rejected.

Gerard Magee, who was sentenced to 20 years for conspiring to cause an explosion after a 47kg bomb was found under a road on the outskirts of Antrim. Magee was arrested at home and taken to Castlereagh interrogation centre where he signed a confession. He claims he was repeatedly beaten during 30 hours of interviews and not allowed to see a solicitor until he confessed. The defendant had no previous convictions and forensic scientists found no evidence linking him to the bomb.

Frank Johnson, who was found guilty of murder, conspiracy to murder and theft in 1976, and jailed for a minimum of 20 years. He was convicted of organising a plan to steal pounds 4,000 along with two other men who threw a petrol bomb into the newsagent's where Johnson worked. His employer, who was set on fire, later died of burns. Johnson, who tried to save the victim's life, denies hatching a plot with the men - one of whom he had only met once. There was no evidence to show the pounds 4,000 existed.

High-profile cases in the dossier include that of Winston Silcott, cleared of killing PC Keith Blakelock during the 1985 Broadwater Farm riots but still serving a life sentence for an earlier murder. Another case involves a man jailed for life for murdering six members of one family in an arson attack in 1984 linked to the so-called Glasgow 'ice-cream wars'.