

Press Release

Date: 29 July 2010

Tamil hunger striker wins libel claims against the 'Daily Mail' and the 'Sun'

Parameswaran Subramanyam, a Tamil refugee, has won his libel claim against the 'Daily Mail' and the 'Sun' newspapers. In April 2009, Parameswaran embarked on a 23-day hunger strike outside the Houses of Parliament as part of a long running demonstration by Tamils resident in the United Kingdom to protest about the civil war in Sri Lanka.

On 9 October 2009, the 'Daily Mail' published untrue and highly defamatory allegations about Parameswaran. The article, entitled, 'Hunger Striker's 7 million Big Mac' falsely claimed that Parameswaran had been secretly eating takeaway burgers throughout his hunger strike and caused the police to waste a fortune in public money. The allegations were repeated by the 'Sun' newspaper on line, in an article entitled, 'Hunger Striker was Lovin it'.

Today, at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, Parameswaran's solicitor, Magnus Boyd, told the Court that the allegations were entirely false. Counsel representing both the 'Sun' and 'Daily Mail' accepted the allegations were indeed untrue and were pleased to set the record straight. Both newspapers have apologised sincerely and unreservedly to Parameswaran and agreed to pay him substantial damages and his legal costs.

Parameswaran said today:

"I am relieved that this matter is now resolved and I can start to rebuild my life again. The past 8 months have been an unbearable strain on my life, to the extent that at times I have even contemplated taking my own life. As a result of the lies that the Newspapers published about me, and through no fault of my own, I have lost friends, been shunned by family members and completely ostracised from the Tamil community.

I felt I had a responsibility to all those who had supported me during the hunger strike, and were sullied by association with me, to take legal action against both newspapers to prove that the allegations that were published were false.

Now that both newspapers have declared that the allegations are completely untrue and apologised, I sincerely hope that those people will accept the newspapers' apologies and understand that I have done nothing wrong. My sacrifice during the 23-day hunger strike was real and for the sake of my fellow Tamils who are suffering in Sri Lanka.

I would like to thank all those who have stuck by me through this nightmare and have not doubted my integrity."

Magnus Boyd of Carter-Ruck, Parameswaran's solicitor said today:

"In the 8 months since the false allegations were published Parameswaran has had to live with the stigma, suspicion and distrust that the articles engendered in the Tamil community and beyond. We are delighted that both newspapers have at last seen sense, climbed down and apologised publicly to Parameswaran for the hurt and distress that they caused him."

Simon Hughes MP, the Liberal Democrats' Deputy Leader in the House of Commons said today:

'I have never encouraged hunger strikes as a means of protest – but understand how people are driven to extreme and dramatic action to support others in their hours of greatest need'.

'I saw Parameswaran for nearly every day of his hunger strike last year and have stayed in contact since. From all I saw and knew about the protest, Parameswaran always acted out of principle and for real. The false allegations about Parameswaran were not just hurtful but clearly aimed at undermining Parameswaran's credibility and the credibility of the whole Tamil protest.

'I am very pleased that Parameswaran has now received a full apology from two national newspapers for the total untruths they published about his protest. I hope that these apologies will go a long way to restore the reputation of a decent and principled young man, and of the Tamils who did right to bring the attention of Britain to the plight of their fellow countrymen at one of the darkest times in their history.'

Siobhain McDonagh, Labour MP for Mitcham and Morden said today:

"Most of us in the UK wouldn't understand just what a devastating blow the newspaper articles alleging Parameswaran had broken his hunger strike by eating a Big Mac would be to his reputation and honour.

Fasting was the sacrifice he was making to bring the UK's attention to the plight of hundreds of thousands of Tamils being killed and injured by the Sri Lankan Government.

To suggest that he had broken his fast in secret, at the height of the Civil War was an insult to him, to his community and to those victims.

While we didn't understand and perhaps the papers involved didn't full understand - the authorities who gave the information certainly did. They did it to undermine and shame the Tamil demonstrators in Parliament Square.

They didn't manage that and the court victory ensures that those forces haven't shamed Parameswaran either.

Congratulations to him and to all the friends who supported him in his fight to clear his name and reputation and to Carter-Ruck for taking on the case. Justice has been done."

Notes to Editors

Please note, this section is not a press release nor a legal opinion.

1. Parameswaran Subramanyam is a Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka. In early 2009 the Sri Lankan army attacked Tamil communities in the north of Sri Lanka. These events caused Tamils resident in the United Kingdom to join together in mounting a spontaneous demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament. The demonstration commenced on 7 April 2009. It was the subject of substantial media coverage.
2. Parameswaran joined the demonstration. He was particularly outraged because he believed that members of his family had been killed by the Sri Lankan army's offensive. On 7 April, on the spur of the moment, he decided to go on hunger strike. He did so in order to bring the attention of the world to the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils. He did not eat again until 30 April. After the hunger strike concluded, Parameswaran was kept in hospital for 5 nights to recover.
3. The damage caused to Parameswaran has been very considerable, in part, because the articles alleged that supporting evidence was caught on camera by a police surveillance team and that police surveillance teams had observed Parameswaran eating. The Metropolitan Police Superintendent who was in charge of the police operation in Parliament Square has confirmed that the police did not see Parameswaran eating and that these allegations were false.
4. Prior to publication of the articles, the newspaper journalists did not contact Parameswaran or any of his friends or family to verify the truth of the allegations before deciding to publish them.