

IN THE MATTER OF CHRIS CHRISTODOULIDES, solicitor

- AND -

IN THE MATTER OF THE SOLICITORS ACT 1974

Mr L N Gilford (in the chair)
Miss T Cullen
Mrs V Murray-Chandra

Date of Hearing: 2nd February 2006

FINDINGS

of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal
Constituted under the Solicitors Act 1974

An application was duly made on behalf of the Law Society by Peter Harland Cadman, solicitor and partner in the firm of Russell Cook of 8 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4BX on 23rd August 2004 that Chris Christodoulides of HM Prison Wandsworth might be required to answer the allegations contained in the statement which accompanied the application and that such order might be made as the Tribunal should think right.

The allegation was that the Respondent had been guilty of conduct unbecoming a solicitor in that he had been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

The application was heard at the Court Room, 3rd Floor, Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, London EC4M 7NS on 2nd February 2006 when Peter Harland Cadman appeared as the Applicant and the Respondent did not appear and was not represented. The Tribunal had before it a copy of the letter dated 20th January 2006 which the Respondent had addressed to the Applicant in which he said "Please may you send me the date of the hearing and address as I have not yet received any documentation and want to attend the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal to have the opportunity to defend myself. Thanking you in advance."

The Applicant pointed out to the Tribunal that the Respondent had instructed a solicitor to represent him and that solicitor had been notified of the hearing date and venue on 19th December 2005. The solicitor had ceased to be instructed on 3rd January 2006.

In a letter addressed to the Applicant by the Respondent, which was undated, the Respondent said “Thank you for your letter of 4th October regarding the facts of the case I admit to being found guilty by Croydon Crown Court. However I do not admit that I did it alone and cannot answer alone as I had a solicitor partner,, who was also involved. When the case does go to the Tribunal I would like to be present at the hearing if in London and a producer sent to the prison however please inform me before hand of the date of the hearing.”

The Tribunal noted the correspondence. The Tribunal did not believe that the Respondent was unaware of the hearing date and the venue. The Respondent had admitted the conviction in the above mentioned letter. His conviction and sentence was not the subject of any appeal. In view of the serious nature of the conviction, the Tribunal would not be minded to impose a sanction other than the ultimate sanction. In view of the Respondent’s admission, it would be open only to him to offer mitigation and not to offer any defence. There could be no mitigation that would cause the Tribunal to impose a less serious sanction than that of a striking off. In all of the circumstances the Tribunal considered that it was right both in the interests of the public and in the interests of preserving the good reputation of the solicitor’s profession to proceed with the substantive hearing.

The Substantive Hearing

The evidence before the Tribunal included the admission of the Respondent referred to above.

At the conclusion of the hearing the Tribunal made the following Order:-

The Tribunal Orders that the Respondent, Chris Christodoulides of c/o HM Prison Wandsworth, solicitor, be struck off the Roll of Solicitors and it further Orders that he do pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of £1,721.50.

The facts are set out in paragraphs 1 to 3 hereunder:-

1. The Respondent, born in 1966, was admitted to the Roll of Solicitors in 2001.
2. At all material times the Respondent was a partner in the firm of Malik Law Chambers, 233 Bethnal Green Road, London, E2 6AB.
3. (i) On 5th April 2005, the Respondent appeared before Croydon Crown Court. He admitted offences of conspiracy to cheat and defraud, conspiracy to facilitate the commission of a breach of the immigration law and attempting to pervert the course of justice.
 - (ii) His Honour Judge Stow QC passed sentence on the Respondent on 25th April 2005. The sentence was that the Respondent should serve a total of nine years imprisonment in respect of all the counts.

The Submissions of the Applicant:-

4. The facts leading to the Respondent's conviction received widespread adverse publicity. In his sentencing remarks, His Honour Judge Stow QC said:-

“You as a solicitor took advantage of a situation where the Home Office might well have been described as over-generous and possibly somewhat lax in their approach to ECAA applications, and that approach was compounded by a misconstruction of a decision of the European Court. You in the circumstances took advantage of that; you used your position as an English solicitor to persuade a substantial number of applicants to part with not inconsiderable sums of money in order to enable you to further their applications for visas for entry into this country in circumstances where both you and probably they knew perfectly well that they were not entitled to those visas.

It is particularly regrettable that you undertook this course of conduct as a solicitor of the Supreme Court. A solicitor of the Supreme Court as you know is an officer of the Court and it is quite appalling that you should have behaved as you did over this considerable period of time.”

He went on to say:

“ It would be difficult to imagine a worse case even if you were not a solicitor, but the fact that you were a solicitor is to my mind a serious aggravating feature.”

5. In the submission of the Applicant the Respondent had been guilty of misconduct at the highest level and his behaviour could serve only to bring the solicitor's profession into disrepute.

The Submissions of the Respondent

6. The Respondent made no submissions.

The Findings of the Tribunal

7. The Tribunal found the allegation to have substantiated. The Tribunal would wish to adopt the remarks of His Honour Judge Stow QC. That a solicitor should be guilty of such behaviour, which of course attracted a great deal of publicity, could only bring the solicitor's profession seriously into disrepute. Members of the public are entitled to expect members of the solicitors' profession to be of the highest integrity, probity and trustworthiness.
8. To demonstrate that the Respondent's behaviour would not be tolerated by the solicitors' profession when the collective good reputation of solicitors was its most important asset, the Tribunal ordered that the Respondent be struck off the Roll of Solicitors.

9. The Applicant sought the costs of and incidental to the application and enquiry in the sum of £1,721.50. The Tribunal considered such costs to be entirely reasonable and in order to save time and further expense the Tribunal ordered the Respondent to pay the Applicant's costs in the fixed sum which he sought.

Dated this 6th day of March 2006
On behalf of the Tribunal

Mr L N Gilford
(Chairman)