

"Regrettably, it seems that the government is prepared to use its citizens as political currency"

David Bermingham,
One of the NatWest Three



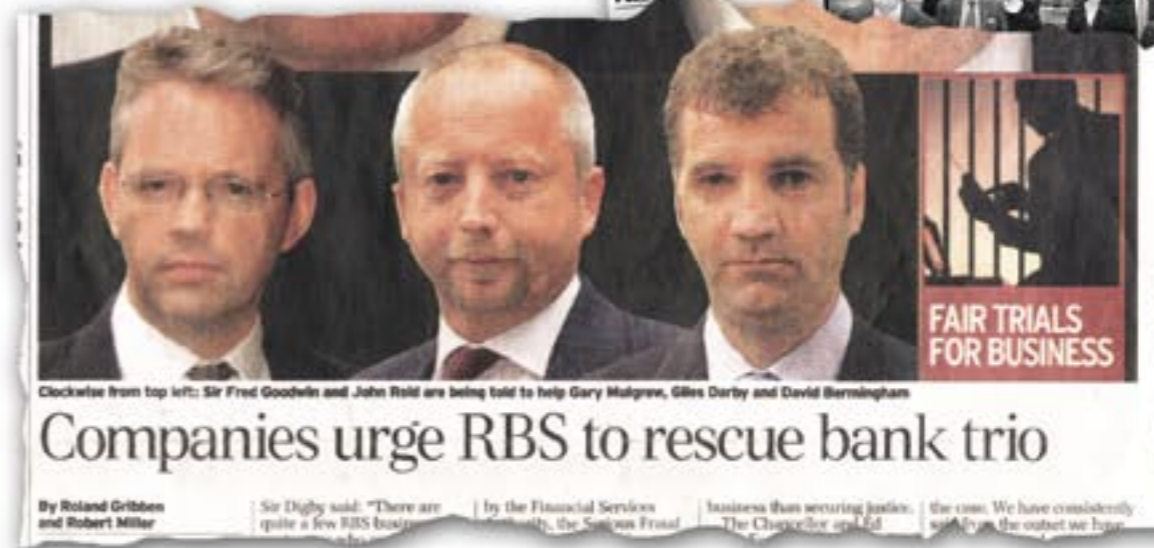
The big picture

Three former bankers, David Bermingham, Gary Mulgrew & Giles Darby, face serious fraud allegations, protest their innocence and are determined to clear their names at trial. Where's the news in this? They stand to be extradited to the US – the UK's closest ally and a mature democracy. What's wrong with that? The 3 are entitled to challenge their extradition through the UK courts and can be assured that human rights

safeguards are properly incorporated in the Extradition Act. All fair and reasonable. Sadly, that's what our government wanted us all to believe.

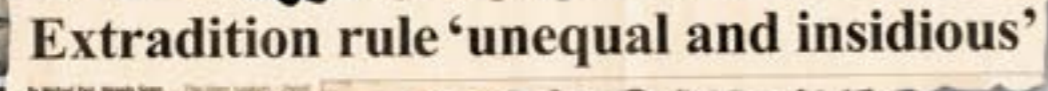
Yet it was to prove not quite the whole story. Bell Yard's dedicated and sustained education programme on the 'NatWest 3's behalf ensured the realities behind the US/UK extradition treaty got aired.

The US extradition of UK businessmen alleged to have defrauded a UK bank on UK soil proves an affront to some people's sense of natural justice.



By broadening the audience, focusing the message, and verifying the facts, critical assessment of the Extradition Act and US/UK Treaty began.

The final legal challenge fails, extradition looms large, so front pages and broadcast media take notice. The inevitable demand for human-interest stories duly materialises.



Perils of doing business with America

Bell Yard.

"The defence has conducted one of the best PR campaigns ever seen. All we're saying in relation to this case is that the extradition appears to have been well founded"

Baroness Scotland of Asthal

"This is about politics not justice. The judgement may go down well in Texas, but not in Britain"

Shami Chakrabarti,
Director, Liberty

"I believe in America, it is a wonderful country. It upholds – in my view – lots of wonderful ideals and yet there is a grotesque injustice in our extradition arrangements"

Boris Johnson,
MP for David Berningham

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It fortnight ago the case of the multimillionaire bankers accused of amassing further multimillions in a complicated fraud against their employers, the Royal Bank of Scotland subsidiary Greenwich NatWest (GNW), was an obscure financial story relegated to most papers' business pages. But such has been the building interest in their case - thanks to a well-organised PR campaign, a number of high-profile supporters and an unconventional march by businessmen through central London - that one news organisation yesterday even chartered a helicopter to record their last seconds in British soil.

The Guardian 14 July 2006

The PR life of Riley

WHO WAS responsible for ensuring the NatWest Three enjoyed such favourable media coverage?

Step forward Melanie Riley of Bell Yard Communications, a litigation consultancy specialising in the niche areas of crisis communications and reputation management.

Through regular briefings and political lobbying, Riley ensured her clients were seen less as three wealthy bankers attempting to escape justice than as the victims of a non-reciprocal extradition treaty with America.

Riley insists she has been working pro bono for the past

six months. "I continue to be happy to assist where I can," she tells me.

Meanwhile, some politicians

Whipping up the sympathy vote

While the public relations campaign behind the NatWest Three cannot really be called a success, since they got on the aircraft yesterday morning and have now spent their first night in custody in the US, their case has certainly achieved a higher and more uncomfortable profile for the government than Tony Blair would have hoped.

Leading lights behind the campaign have been Melanie Riley of Bell Yard, who was first employed by the three in August 2004, joined by more recent

Financial Times 14 July 2006

Ms Riley is the co-founder of Bell Yard, a "crisis communications and reputation management consultancy" hired by the NatWest Three last year. But this year she started to work without payment.

She said: "I have been working pro bono for the last six months because I believe in the case. We have worked hard to ensure that people understood the inequity of the Extradition Act."

The Times 13 July 2006

Evening Standard, 18 July 2006

Extradition rule 'unequal and insidious'