

Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party leader

Delivered to "Behind Closed Doors: Ten Years of Secret Evidence and Hidden Suffering" public meeting held by Campaign Against Secret Evidence and the Cordoba Foundation at the London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel on 19 December 2011

I am sorry that I cannot be with you today and want to take this opportunity to pledge my continued support to the Campaign against Secret Evidence. The Green Party is fully behind this and other campaigns opposing draconian measures brought in as part of the so called war against terror.

I wanted to share a quote with you:

I can still recall my deep feeling of shame when I heard the appellant ask the judge the question: "why are you sending me to prison?" To which the judge replied: "I cannot tell you that". I could not believe that I was witnessing such an event... I could not believe that nobody protested or made a fuss. They simply took him to jail, without any explanation at all.

This anecdote was not told by a lawyer in some far away land, but by Dinah Rose QC, a barrister with direct experience of working with the UK's Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which assesses deportation cases, often taking evidence in closed sessions.

The idea that the state should have the power detain people on the basis of secret evidence is shocking enough. The fact that more than a dozen individuals have had their lives destroyed through the use of this power over the last decade is a shame on this country and makes a mockery of its judicial system. There can be no justification for the accused and their legal representation not to be able to properly examine evidence and at least see that it has been obtained in a wholly legal manner.

Upon introduction of secret evidence powers, we were assured they would only be used in the most extreme cases. Entirely predictably secret evidence can now be used in a wide range of cases - including deportation hearings, control order proceedings, parole board cases, asset-freezing applications, employment tribunals, and even claims for damages, according to the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

We have been here before. In 1971 the Government pursued a policy of using secret evidence to imprison people they accused of involvement with the IRA. Back then it led to an increase in terrorism related deaths and in terrorist violence.

In other words, this kind of approach did not work. Fast forward 30 odd years and there is a complete lack of evidence that the anti-terrorism measures introduced in the wake of 9/11 have deterred or prevented potential terrorists – on the contrary.

I have personally been working to secure justice for Babar Ahmed, who has now been in prison for more than seven years even though he has not been charged in the UK. 141,000 British citizens have signed a petition to put him on trial here.

The US is demanding Babar's extradition on the basis of evidence that he has never seen. As it has recently transpired, our own Crown Prosecution Service has not seen this evidence either – the Metropolitan Police passed the evidence straight to US authorities. If extradited, Babar faces the prospect of solitary confinement for life in 'supermax' conditions, conditions which arguably amount to torture.

MPs voted earlier this month to review extradition law so there is hope that we might secure change. I will be fighting to ensure this is meaningful change – not similar to the control orders "light" that the Coalition Government has tried to sell us as part of its Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures.

A fair trial should not be a luxury in the UK – it should be a basic right. I will continue to fight on behalf of those denied their rights and am proud to stand alongside you in doing so.

Thank you.

Caroline Lucas, Green Party leader and MP