

🕒 This article is more than **13 years old**

# Union pickets seek to quash 40-year-old convictions

**Pickets, including actor Ricky Tomlinson, to argue that Conservative government interfered with judicial process**



📷 Des Warren (left) and Ricky Tomlinson, the Shrewsbury Two who were jailed for their parts in a building workers' strike in 1972, pictured after the release of Warren in 1975. Photograph: PA

---

---

## **Duncan Campbell**

Tue 3 Apr 2012 00.01 BST

A group of trade union pickets who were jailed nearly 40 years ago in a famous case are seeking to have their convictions overturned on the grounds that the then Conservative government interfered with the judicial process.

The pickets will argue that they were the victims of a government plot to make an example of trade union activists who took part in successful picketing.

The men who received the longest sentences, Ricky Tomlinson and Des Warren, became known as the Shrewsbury Two and were the focus of a long-running campaign against the government's policy on union law in general, and flying pickets in particular.

Tomlinson, jailed for two years for conspiracy to intimidate, has since become a successful actor, starring in many films and on television in Brookside and The Royle Family. Warren, jailed for three years, died of Parkinson's disease in 2004.

Now some of those convicted and their supporters will on Tuesday present an application to the [Criminal Cases Review Commission](#) (CCRC) in Birmingham in an attempt to have their convictions overturned.

"We were innocent then and we're innocent now," said Tomlinson. "I promised Dessie that I would continue the fight to clear the names of all convicted pickets."

The convictions, at Shrewsbury crown court in 1973, came in the wake of the first ever national building workers' strike in 1972. It lasted for twelve weeks and helped to secure a significant pay rise for building workers. Five months later, in a series of arrests 24 unions members who had served on the picket lines were eventually convicted of offences ranging from conspiracy to unlawful assembly and affray. Six of them were jailed.

The trial became a major political event. At its conclusion, the judge told Warren: "you are no martyr ... You thought you could flout the law. You were wrong." Warren replied: "The only conspiracy was between the government, the employers and the police." The Shrewsbury Two then became a cause célèbre in a long-running campaign to have them freed.

The application to the CCRC by the solicitors, Bindmans, is based on four years of work by researcher Eileen Turnbull. It will claim that the Conservative government interfered with the judicial process by encouraging the prosecutions to deter effective picketing, then a standard process in industrial disputes. Turnbull said that she used the National Archives at Kew to uncover details of the decision-making process in the prosecution.

"There is a lot of material and we are very optimistic that we will finally be able to overturn what we believe is a miscarriage of justice," she said. The legal submission claims that the trials were an "abuse of process" and the convictions should be quashed by the court of appeal. The CCRC has the power to refer such cases to the court of appeal.

At the time of the dispute, there were strong connections between leaders of the construction industry and the Conservative party. The strike was regarded by the Conservative government as a crucial challenge to their authority and was seen as part of the build-up to the later confrontation between the government and unions which culminated in the miners' strike in 1984.

"There was a conspiracy but it was not amongst building workers," said Terry Renshaw, a convicted picket. "It was between the building industry bosses and the Tory government. The picketing on the day that the alleged incidents took place was peaceful - in fact, when we got on the coach to go

home the police complimented us on our behaviour. It is important that we continue the fight to clear our names and correct this injustice."

---

---

---

## More on this story



**Ricky Tomlinson calls on government to lift 'veil of secrecy' on Shrewsbury 24**

20 Jan 2013



**Shrewsbury 24 case: Heath government discussed prosecution of union pickets**

11 Oct 2012 |  ...



**Ricky Tomlinson's Royle appointment with the Labour conference**

2 Oct 2012



## Most viewed