
Asil Nadir, Cypriot Tycoon Found Guilty

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Asil Nadir, the Turkish Cypriot businessman who fled from Britain to Cyprus, returning two years ago, has been found guilty of three counts of theft following a six-month trial. A jury at the Old Bailey cleared Nadir, after initial confusion, of one other count but is still considering a further nine counts after being given a majority direction. The verdicts draw to a close a high-profile prosecution brought by the Serious Fraud Office which had alleged that Nadir (71) had "abused" his power as chairman and chief executive of Polly Peck, a company he had helped to build into an international business.

The six-month trial has lost an estimated five weeks due to jury illness and two jurors had to be discharged. At times the case has been highly technical, with prosecutors going into great detail about offshore companies.

Nadir faced 13 specimen counts of theft amounting to £34 million between 1987 and 1990.

During the trial, he was accused of using millions of pounds "stolen" from Polly Peck secretly to buy shares to support the conglomerate's stock price, to buy expensive properties for himself and relatives and to pay for his horse racing interests.

The Turkish Cypriot tycoon, who "fled" the country in 1993 and returned in 2010, "helped himself to tens of millions of pounds" of Polly Peck's money in transfers amounting to more than £146 million, the Old Bailey heard the Serious Fraud Office allege. Nadir had denied the charges.

Philip Shears QC, prosecuting, told the jury a number of offshore firms were used by Nadir to carry out the covert purchase of shares and options. A "primary purpose" was to bolster the company's share price, he told the court.

Mr Shears told the court that each penny rise on the Polly Peck share price increased the value of Nadir's disclosed shareholding by, for example, £950,000 in December 1989.

The court heard Nadir used £4 million of "stolen" money to buy real estate for himself and his relatives, including £2 million that was put towards a country mansion worth £7 million at Burley on the Hill in Rutland. The court also heard that former prime minister Margaret Thatcher was urged by Turkey to help save Nadir's ailing Polly Peck conglomerate from collapse in 1990.

Turgut Ozal, then president of Turkey, wrote to Mrs Thatcher in September 1990 as the firm's share price was plummeting, asking that the UK government let "no undue harm" be done to the company "that has been a useful bond between Turkey and the UK", the court heard.

Günes Taner, Turkish finance minister, also wrote to then foreign secretary Douglas Hurd telling him the Turkish government was "examining what support Turkey can give to Polly Peck International at this time", urging that the UK government assist by arranging for Polly Peck's lending banks "to hold the situation steady in the meantime".

Nadir told the jury, however, that the president later received an ultimatum from Mr Hurd in the form of a message one Saturday "that if £100 million were not there by the following Monday, "everything is over";. (JANE CROFT- <http://www.irishtimes.com> - Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2012)