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**CORE and Leigh Day welcome jail sentence for first modern slavery offences, but still no prosecution in case of ‘worst UK gangmaster ever’?’**

A corporate accountability group has welcomed news that for the first time, a British businessman has been prosecuted and sentenced for human trafficking offences, but questions why there has been no prosecution in a similar case involving a company described as the ‘worst UK gangmaster ever’.

Bed factory owner, Mohammed Rafiq, was handed a two-year prison sentence after becoming the first businessman in the UK to be convicted of conspiracy to traffic. The sentence related to the trafficking of men from Hungary who were put to work in Mr Rafiq’s Leeds-based mattress factory, which supplied major UK brands including John Lewis and Next. The men were paid as little as £10 per week and made to live in cramped and unsafe conditions.

“The use of slave labour in UK supply chains must be stamped out,” said Marilyn Croser, Director of CORE, the UK coalition on corporate accountability. “As well as greater vigilance among business, criminal prosecutions are needed to prevent and punish such abuses, and we welcome efforts by UK police to prosecute traffickers in the UK.”

The Hungarian factory workers’ experience appears remarkably similar to that of Lithuanian workers who were trafficked to the UK and put to work in chicken farms by British company, DJ Houghton Catching Services Ltd and its director, Darrell Houghton, and company secretary, Jackie Judge.

In 2012, police and the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) raided the premises of DJ Houghton in Kent, liberating over 30 Lithuanian men from conditions described by the GLA as “horrific”. Shortly after the raids, the GLA announced it had evidence that the workers lived in a climate of fear in which they were subjected to threats and physical violence, were charged excessive job finding fees, lived in overcrowded accommodation and had their pay stopped for spurious reasons.

The GLA said the case was one of the worst instances of exploitation it had ever uncovered in the food supply chain, and labelled DJ Houghton the ‘worst UK gangmaster ever’.

Sixteen of the men who used to work for DJ Houghton are now suing the company, Darrell Houghton and Jackie Judge in the High Court, seeking compensation for their ordeal. While Houghton and Judge were arrested following the police raid in 2012, no prosecutions have taken place.

Shanta Martin, partner at law firm Leigh Day, who represents the Lithuanian men in the civil claim, stated “It is difficult to understand why there has been no prosecution in respect of our clients’ case. There seems to be an enormous amount of documentary evidence and readily accessible witnesses willing to testify. Members of the public have also recently come forward to provide information on the whereabouts of a Lithuanian middle man with whom the Houghtons allegedly worked.

**Background:**

GLA press releases from 2012 and 2014 can be found here: <http://www.gla.gov.uk/PageFiles/1373/Revocation%20press%20release%2030-10-12f.pdf>; <http://www.gla.gov.uk/PageFiles/1532/DJ%20houghton%20final.pdf>

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