

# Britain: Jury fails to convict man for beheading Thatcher statue

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A British jury could not be persuaded to convict the man who beheaded a statue of former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on December 17, despite his freely admitting to have attacked it with a cricket bat and an iron pole. After deliberating for almost four hours, the jury at London's Southwark Crown Court said it was unable to reach a verdict and a new trial was set for January 22.

Paul Kelleher, a 37-year-old theatre producer, admitted walking up to the eight-feet high two-ton Italian Carrara marble statue by sculptor Neil Simmons, valued at £150,000 and destined to stand in the members lobby of the House of Commons, while it was on display in London's Guildhall in July and decapitating it. When officers arrived to arrest him, he was sitting on a bench waiting to be caught.

The jury's failure to reach a verdict was clearly due to political differences that could not be reconciled, a fact acknowledged by both the judge and the prosecution, and by Kelleher who defended himself on an explicitly political basis.

Kelleher said, in a defence that included his opposition to capitalism and war, "The object of the exercise was to go to court. It is a vehicle to highlight many points."

He denied the charge of criminal damage, saying it was a matter of artistic expression, "my right to interact with this broken world" and an "act of satirical humour". He said that the statue symbolised the ills of the world's political system. He was partly motivated by his desire to protect his two-year-old son from the ills of global capitalism.

When asked in court whether he knew his actions were an offence of criminal damage, Kelleher replied, "I can highlight all the criminal damage Margaret Thatcher caused by being in power."

In his closing speech he implored the jury to acquit him, saying, "You will have martyrs' crowns placed upon your heads and your names written in the history books as the people who took back power from the establishment."

Prosecutor John Hardy said, "Kelleher attacked the statue as it stood on display at London's Guildhall Gallery on July 3 because he felt it represented the ills of the world's political system."

Some people may have had "a sneaking admiration" for his protest, he added, because, "It is right to say that the Thatcher years engendered a great deal of personal feeling.... Some feel Mrs. Thatcher was the saviour of her country. Others hold an entirely contrary view."

He then asked that the jury ignore such political considerations. Kelleher might be a "man of principle", said Hardy, "but the fact that one is a man of principle does not entitle one to go around committing acts of wanton destruction."

Directing the jury, Mr. Justice Richard Aikens said, "He said he lopped off the head of the statue as a means of demonstrating that the political system personified by Mrs. Thatcher was a danger to the defendant and to the world in general."

The jurors could only decide that Mr. Kelleher was legally justified in behaving in this way if they felt his well-being and that of his two-year-old son were immediately endangered by the economic and political system personified by Baroness Thatcher, he directed.

The eight women and four men could not agree whether Kelleher had a "lawful excuse" for decapitating Thatcher's statue. Even an hour and a half after being given permission to return a majority verdict, they were still no closer to an agreement. The judge finally asked if there were any reasonable prospect that 10 of them might ever agree—the

minimum number required for a verdict—and the forewoman replied, “No, your honour.”

The statue has been returned to the artist, who will try to repair it, but this will be a far easier task than repairing the social and political divide revealed in the jury’s response to its decapitation. The hatred Thatcher engenders is not confined to Kelleher, but shared by the bulk of Britain’s population. The only surprise is that the jury was so evenly split, and it is to be hoped that next time Kelleher’s jury will be a more representative sample of the general population and he will thus walk free.



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