

'Banker wrongly targeted by dirty money law'

Martin Bentham Home Affairs Editor

A "FAT CAT international banker" whose school-age daughter had \$20 million of shares is claiming he was wrongly targeted with a landmark new law designed to stop dirty money flowing into London, the High Court heard today.

The man, referred to only as "Mr A", is under scrutiny via an unexplained wealth order over the purchase of two multi-million-pound properties, including one in London.

The court heard the National Crime Agency had claimed he was a civil servant in a state-owned bank who would not have earned enough to buy such

expensive properties. But his barrister, James Lewis QC, said the NCA's case was based on a flawed interpretation of the new law, and on newspaper cuttings about Mr A's conviction for fraud during a "Kafka-esque" overseas trial which had been conducted in "flagrant" breach of international standards of justice.

Mr Lewis said the NCA was wrong to characterise Mr A as a civil servant when he had, in fact, been a successful commercial banker who attended high-level summits. The barrister added: "He was a fat cat international banker... who went to Davos as part of his activities." The court heard evidence of the wealth of Mr A, who comes from outside Eur-

ope, was submitted to the Home Office a decade ago during an application for a Tier 1 investor visa. This had shown his net worth then was £72.5 million.

The application showed his daughter, who was at school in London, had shares worth \$20 million with annual dividend earnings of \$1.3 million. This showed he was far from the modestly paid civil servant portrayed by the NCA, the court heard. Today's hearing is the first case relating to an unexplained wealth order since new legislation came into effect this year. One order was issued against the man's wife, the other applies to a trust alleged to own another property.

BIRTHDAY BUBBLES JLO TOASTS HER 49TH



JENNIFER LOPEZ celebrates turning 49 with friends, family — and several bottles of champagne. The singer posted a picture of herself wearing a bikini at the beach party on Instagram, captioned: "Current birthday situation... yup."

'Fifty-year-old divorce laws are no longer fit for purpose'

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remains satisfactory". He highlighted changes to "social and moral values" over time. Simon Beccle, a partner at Payne Hicks Beach, said client Mrs Owens had been left "devastated" by the ruling, and accused the Supreme Court of a "missed opportunity" to take a stand on divorce laws.

Alex Carruthers, a partner at Hughes Fowler Carruthers, said: "The judges were constrained by laws made almost 50 years ago which are no longer fit for purpose. The clamour in the legal profession for reform of our arcane divorce laws and the introduction of no-fault divorces is now deafening."

Mr and Mrs Owens married in 1978 and lived at Broadway, Worcestershire, building up a mushroom business and buying four houses, including one in France. They had two children but their union was shaken when Mrs Owens admitted to an affair in 2012.

Mr Owens, however, argued he had forgiven his wife for her infidelity and believed they "still have a few years of old age together", refusing to accept her 2015 petition for divorce.

Mrs Owens argued that her husband had behaved unreasonably by being "moody" and constantly berating her over her infidelity, including embarrassing her in front of their friends.

But Judge Robin Tolson said Mr Owens' behaviour was "to be expected in a marriage" and refused to sanction the divorce — a decision backed by the



Battle: Hugh Owens says he has forgiven wife Tini for her infidelity and believes they "still have a few years of old age together"

Appeal Court despite acceptance that it was a "wretchedly unhappy marriage". However, announcing the decision, Lord Wilson said the Supreme Court was "with reluctance" dismissing Mrs Owens' appeal, saying that although the original judge's ruling was flawed and he had not considered her whole case, her arguments "fail to surmount the high hurdle for intervention by this court".

The judge added that Mrs Owens will be eligible under current laws to divorce her husband in 2020, when they have spent five years living apart.

Joanne Wescott, a partner at law firm Osbornes and an expert in divorce cases, said: "The decision today is a sad state of affairs where a woman has to remain married to a man because of a legal technicality."

"Tini Owens now finds herself in the situation where she must wait until 2020 to divorce her husband."

"This case surely highlights that the current divorce law is no longer fit for purpose and Parliament must now act to change the law to prevent such a sad state of affairs from continuing."

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