British court overturns conviction of man convicted of airport 'threat' on Twitter

Cassandra Vinograd, Associated Press

A British man on Friday won a High Court challenge of his conviction for tweeting that he would blow up an airport if his flight was canceled, a ruling that had made him an Internet free speech cause celebre.

Paul Chambers, 28, was convicted and fined 385 pounds ($605) in 2010 over the tweet that he would blow up Robin Hood Airport in northern England, which he insisted was a joke. Thousands of Twitter supporters retweeted Chambers' message after he was convicted with the tag "I Am Spartacus" - a reference to the 1960 movie epic in which the titular hero's fellow rebels all assume his identity in a gesture of solidarity.

His lawyer had argued before the High Court that if his tweet was considered menacing, then William Shakespeare could have been convicted for quipping, "Let's kill all the lawyers," in his play, "Henry VI."

High Court judges on Friday overturned Chambers' conviction, saying there was no evidence to suggest that anyone who saw the tweet found it to be menacing or alarming.

"I am relieved, vindicated - it is ridiculous it ever got this far," Chambers said after the verdict.

U.K. celebrities such as broadcaster Stephen Fry and comedian Al Murray had also voiced their support for Chambers.

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