

UK Men Avoid Charges for Taking Food Waste from Supermarket

JILL LAWLESS, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British prosecutors on Wednesday reversed their initial decision and dropped criminal charges against a trio of dumpster-divers who allegedly took discarded food from a trash bin behind a supermarket.

The prosecution of Paul May, Jason Chan and William James had drawn widespread criticism.

The Guardian newspaper reported that the three men, who live in a squatted property in north London, took tomatoes, mushrooms, cheese and cakes worth 33 pounds (\$55) from behind a branch of retailer Iceland in October.

They had been charged under the 1824 Vagrancy Act — titled An act for the punishment of idle and disorderly persons, and rogues and vagabonds — and ordered to appear in court next week.

As the case caused a flurry of criticism on social media sites, Iceland released a statement stressing that it had not called the police or instigated the prosecution.

After initially confirming the charges, the Crown Prosecution Service said Wednesday that "this case has been reviewed by a senior lawyer and it has been decided that a prosecution is not required in the public interest."

The law firm representing the three defendants, Bindmans, said it was pleased with the prosecutors' decision — but sorry it had come just days before the trial had been due to start, "and clearly in the light of media exposure."

In a statement, the firm said the men had planned to plead not guilty, "arguing that they were not acting dishonestly — a defense we felt confident the court would agree with at this time of austerity, food banks, food waste and profligacy by supermarkets."

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