
INTERVENTION

Sharon Hodgson MP, Interviewed

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Sharon Hodgson MP's work with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ticket Abuse led to her being approached for an interview with Mark James and Guy Osborn. Their Intervention, 'A New Dawn for Ticket Regulation,' details in part the Private Members Bill, the Sale of Tickets (Sporting and Cultural Events) Bill, which Sharon Hodgson attempted to introduce in 2010. The interview below, conducted in October 2023 via email correspondence, attempts to contextualise the genesis of the Bill, its rationale, and why it failed to be passed. It should be read in conjunction with the James and Osborn Intervention linked above. The ESLJ has consistently adopted different models and approaches for its Interventions section, including interviews, see for example, the previously published interview with Ken Foster, and this follows in that tradition.

About Sharon Hodgson (adapted from https://www.sharonhodgson.org/about_sharon).

Biography

Sharon Hodgson was elected as the Labour MP for Gateshead East and Washington West in 2005, and then (following boundary changes) for the new constituency of Washington. Sharon was first elected as the MP for Sunderland West in 2010. Sharon has consecutively been re-elected as the MP for Washington and Sunderland West at all three General Elections since 2010: 2015, 2017, and 2019.

Sharon has taken on many roles in Parliament since her election in 2005, including on key parliamentary committees (such as the Children, Schools, and Families Select Committee), Parliamentary Private Secretary to three different government Ministers, Government Whip, Opposition Whip, and Shadow Ministerial roles (Children and Families 2010–2013; Women and Equalities 2013–2015; Children 2015–2016; Public Health 2016–2020; Veterans 2020–2021). In April 2021, Sharon was appointed to be Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to the Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of HM Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer MP. Sharon has served under all Leaders of the Labour Party since 2005.

A key area of Sharon's wider work in Parliament is her involvement in a number of All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). These committees allow Sharon to tailor her work around a range of topics that she is especially dedicated to. Sharon is the Chair of seven APPGs: **Ovarian Cancer; Art, Craft and Design in Education; Dyslexia and SpLD; School Food; Coeliac disease; Medicine and Medical Device Harm;** and **Ticket Abuse**. She also Co-Chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) on: **Music** and **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis ME**.

The Interview

MJ & GO: What sparked your interest in tickets and in particular the secondary market? Was it something that happened to you, a particular incident that happened to a fan or at a music event, or was it driven by concerns raised by your constituents?

SH: This issue is personal. It started when my daughter wanted to attend the 2010 Take That UK stadium tour, "Progress Live," starting in Sunderland. There were four individual shows in Sunderland but, despite searching for tickets the evening of the day they were released (tickets are usually released mid-morning when most people are in school or working), all tickets were sold out. All that could be found were tickets on websites I now know are secondary ticketing websites and for massively inflated prices.

Both my teenage daughter and I were flabbergasted that people who had bought them that morning, had somehow realised that they now could not go and were selling their tickets on for profit. Then the penny dropped. This was deliberate. Touts had bought up large volumes of tickets precisely to sell on for a large profit. My crusade was born.

MJ & GO: What steps did you take to try and address the problems caused by ticket touting?

SH: First and foremost, I tried to introduce my Private Members Bill which was sadly talked out by Conservative Members. Then I secured amendments to the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and would go on to support Nigel Adams MP's Ban the Bots amendment a few years later. Over time, I have built up an effective coalition in Parliament and the wider music industry and we have relentlessly lobbied Government to limit the power of the secondary ticketing market. The most recent example of this has been our opposition to aspects of the Royal Albert Hall private Bill recently debated in the House of Lords. We have also worked closely with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) although, in my experience, regulatory bodies often lack the powers and resources to tackle such widespread fraud when it occurs.

MJ & GO: Why did you choose to tackle ticket touting by creating a Private Members Bill? What levels of cross-party support did you receive when it was introduced?

SH: As mentioned, we have lobbied the Government and attempted to speak to third party actors like Google or the CMA. However, sites such as viagogo have, despite setbacks, continued to bounce back and resume their shady activities.

We must tackle this problem at the roots with concrete legislation which limits the influence of these secondary ticketing sites which enable the fraudulent harvesting and reselling of tickets (often using bots and other malicious software).

Unfortunately, I received very little crossbench support; the Tories remain committed to free market solutions which has only seen certain sites monopolise and exploit ticket resales. In 2011, in opposition to my Bill, Sajid Javid went as far as calling touts "classic entrepreneurs" more than once.

Interestingly, many of those on the Labour benches who sponsored my bill (below), some of them new members, would go on to have exciting parliamentary careers, and may be in positions of influence in a future Labour government. The Sale of Tickets (Sporting and Cultural Events) Bill was presented by: *Mrs Sharon Hodgson*, and supported by: *Mr Tom Watson, Chris Bryant, Paul Farrelly, Mr Russell Brown, David Wright, Mark Tami, Lyn Brown, Roberta Blackman-Woods, Mary Creagh, Rachel Reeves and Catherine McKinnell*

MJ & GO: Can you talk us through what your Bill proposed as a way of reducing ticket touting?

SH: My fundamental proposal is capping resales at **face value plus 10%**. Under this proposal, sites such as viagogo could still exist, they would just have to ensure customers are charged only up to a capped price much like ethical ticketing sites (for example, Twickets) are already doing.

Previously the Government believed that secondary ticketing transparency alone, in the form of the measures we secured in the Consumer Rights Act 2015, would be enough. However, we have only seen the worst of these secondary ticketing companies grow and continue to fleece customers while enforcement agencies remain critically under resourced.

More broadly, I support the three-point plan put forward by the FanFair Alliance who I have worked with closely over many years. These are:

1. New legislation:

New laws making it illegal to resell a ticket for profit, bringing the UK into line with other progressive music markets—for instance, France, Ireland, Japan, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Norway

2. Tech action:

Platforms like Google and YouTube must stop promoting touts and help direct consumers towards legitimate sources of tickets.

3. Industry action:

Across the board, the live music business needs to make capped consumer-friendly ticket resale visible and viable. These services are now widely supported, but we need more people to know about them.

Legislation is crucial to achieving these aims.

MJ & GO: Why, in your opinion, did the Bill not become law?

SH: The Conservative Government was simply too dogmatic and committed to their free-market ideology to introduce simple consumer protections. This comes in light of the fact that numerous media reports have indicated high levels of fraud and speculative listing on viagogo (e.g., here and here) that the CMA made their recommendations to Government in August 2021.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cma-calls-for-stronger-laws-to-tackle-illegal-ticket-resale>

Rather than follow the CMA's expert opinion, Kevin Hollinrake MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Business & Trade, stated that: "The government believes in the power of competitive markets to give consumers choice and flexibility."

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1155785/government-response-to-CMAs-secondary-ticketing-report.pdf

The FanFair Alliance and I believe that this assessment was made, without any expert consultation with artist representatives or the live music business—although we understand that viagogo made at least one presentation to officials in the Department of Business & Trade, in February 2022. In short, despite recognition from the CMA of ongoing and serious failings in the secondary ticketing market, British consumers now face the following scenario:

- Consumer protection laws that can't be enforced.
- Enforcement agencies with no budgets to protect them.
- Ticket touts becoming ever more sophisticated.
- A platform that monopolises ticket touting that can't be prosecuted.
- A government that can see no wrong in the current unregulated market even when issues are clearly pointed out to them by members of the Ticket Abuse campaign or the CMA.

MJ & GO: What are your thoughts on the approaches of other countries to secondary ticketing? Several Australian states and Ireland seem to have followed through on the proposals from your PMB?

SH: Each of these systems have merits. I believe Ireland, however, who basically took my PMB and made it Law, provide a perfect case study. Near zero Taylor Swift tickets were touted in Ireland compared to the innumerable number touted on her UK tour. That is money lost to the industry due to fans not being able to afford to attend more gigs or buy merchandise or refreshments at the gigs.

Ireland in general has signalled to the world that it supports the creative industries and fans rather than touts.

MJ & GO: What are you doing currently to take your ideas forward? Will you be proposing an updated version of your PMB for the Labour Party Manifesto?

SH: My team and I have had discussion at all levels of the party and remain optimistic.

However, as I say in all my campaigns, a manifesto commitment is the bare minimum a government must do. So if this doesn't make a Labour manifesto the ticket abuse campaign will continue right up until the day this legislation is drafted, voted for, and given Royal Assent. This piece was originally submitted on 8 December 2023, and accepted 13 February 2024. On 14 March 2024 the Labour Party announced their plans to clamp down on ticket touts by introducing legislation.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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