

Lawyer Tacopina and Chico's story

New York: his law office reopens the case of an Italian in prison since 1999. Appeal to Renzi.

NY lawyer Joe Tacopina, who is also president of Bologna Football Club, reopens Chico Forti's case: an Italian convicted to life imprisonment in the US, for a murder he affirms he never committed.

"It is proven that all the evidence collected was part of a plan to set up Forti", as stated by Tacopina, who also asked Prime Minister Renzi and the current government to be a support, in his attempt to reopen the case. Pier Ferdinando Casini is helping as well.

A glimmer of hope shining from New York to Matteo Renzi Lawyer Tacopina reopens Chico Forti's case

Bologna FC president, who took in charge the defense of the Italian in prison for 16 years, is asking the government for help.

Chico Forti's freedom is hanging by a thread. A thread going from Florida, where Forti is in prison since 1999, to Rome, in Prime Minister Renzi's hands, passing through Bologna and New York, where Joe Tacopina legal office is located. Last year, after Amanda Knox, the lawyer took in charge the defense of another person charged with murder, the Italian Chico Forti, who primarily needs to be protected from justice itself.

Forti, a 52-year-old man from Trento, who moved to Florida in 1992, was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering Dale Pike, with no evidence and a questionable trial. As stated by the judge during the verdict: "the Court has no proof you actually pulled the trigger on the murder but I feel that you were the instigator".

Today Tacopina, who accepted this responsibility for free, assures that, after one year investigating in Germany, Spain, Italy and Florida, he has new elements that prove Forti's innocence. He also affirms that "the prosecutor and the Police manipulated the evidence"; for instance, unknown DNA traces near the corpse.

This is why he, along with Forti's family, decided to write to the Italian government, asking "to support our efforts aimed at reopening the case of an Italian unfairly sentenced to life imprisonment". Matteo Renzi promised he would have discuss it with President Obama during his visit to the White House. The Chairman of the Italian Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, Pier Ferdinando Casini, received both Tacopina and Francesco Guidetti, a friend of Forti who testified at the trial. According to Casini "from several points of view, we have the impression that Forti is not the murderer. We will try, as far as possible, to convince US justice to reopen the case. Renzi and I have already talked about it". "For the whole trial I had a feeling that it was a farce, with no evidence and an inattentive jury", stated Guidetti.

After making his fortune with real estate trading, during the purchase of a hotel on Ibiza, Chico Forti came across Thomas Knott, who turned out to be a swindler. He introduced Forti to Anthony Pike, the owner of the Pike's hotel Forti bought at a later stage. On February 15th, 1998, to finalize the purchase, Pike's son, Dale, took a flight to Miami where Forti picked him up at the airport. Forti always affirmed he left Dale Pike with people related to Knott; in the meantime, the relationship between them deteriorated.

The day after, the dead body of Dale Pike was found and the Police immediately blamed Forti, even with no evidence, of swindling the owners of the hotel. His only fault, according to the supporters of his innocence, was to deny he picked up Dale at the airport, afraid of being investigated. "It is proven that all the evidence collected was part of a plan to set up Forti", stated Tacopina.

Why should Miami Police plot such a plan against him?

At this stage, new elements emerge. Forti was also a filmmaker and, before Dale Pike's murder, he had shot a documentary on the ambiguous circumstances related to the death of the stylist Gianni Versace and the man charged with his murder. In this documentary, called *Il sorriso della medusa*, Forti questioned Miami Police behaviour.

This is believed to be the real reason why the police wanted to incarcerate Forti. "There were no testimonies, nor evidence, nor motive against him and the testimonies in his favor were not considered", asserted Tacopina. There was, instead, a conflict of interest regarding the defense attorney, "who was working for the Office of the general state attorney".

As well as a doubt regarding the waiver signed by Forti, in which he declared to know about this conflict of interest. According to Tacopina, this document cannot be considered authentic, since the waiver dates to a day Forti was on quarantine in prison infirmary, due to an allergy. There is a great number of inconsistencies in Forti's case, starting from the reason why Knott was not investigated, despite having a motive, swindling Anthony Pike for millions of dollars.

Those inconsistencies were meticulously put together by lawyer Tacopina in order to reopen the case with a retrial, which has been denied five times, "to the Supreme Court as well". In Bologna, the president Joe Tacopina is well known for hardly giving up.

The story

In 1998, Anthony Pike's son, who was doing business with Chico Forti, was found dead in Miami.

Despite the scarcity of evidence, Forti was sentenced and charged with the murder: he has been imprisoned 16 years ago.

Joe Tacopina took in charge his defense and is determined to reopen the case.

Judicial odyssey

On the left Joe Tacopina, few days ago, in his NY legal office at 275 Madison Avenue. Above Chico Forti in the early 90s taken at Club della Vela di Mondello (Palermo).