

Persecuted UK sub-postmasters offered rock-bottom compensation, denied justice

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The persecution of thousands of wrongly convicted sub-postmasters continues in Britain, despite the national outcry over their treatment following the broadcast earlier this month of the TV drama *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*.

Each episode in the four-part drama was watched over 9 million times on immediate transmission and then subsequently streamed a further more than 12 million times. The series, focussing on the justice campaign set up by postmaster Alan Bates, examined how hundreds of post office workers were wrongfully convicted and held financially responsible for errors produced by faulty Fujitsu accountancy software Horizon between 1999 and 2015.

Over 900 sub-postmasters were convicted of theft, fraud and false accounting. Around 700 of these prosecutions were carried out by the Post Office itself, which hounded its victims like a mafiosi outfit, acting as judge, jury and executioner.

Many lost thousands, or tens of thousands, of pounds. In one case a couple lost £200,000 due to their prosecution. As well as their careers, some lost their homes. Lives were ruined, with victims ending up with criminal records, jailed and having their families torn apart. The scandal is linked to at least four suicides.

Despite all this, just 93 have had their convictions quashed.

Mr Bates supercharged the more than 20-year fight for justice and the Sunak government, which faces a general election later this year, was forced to promise “new primary legislation” to deliver a blanket exoneration. More than 4,000 people are now eligible for compensation, with well over a hundred more people coming forward with claims as a result of the broadcast.

Barely a month has passed, however, before the

crocodile tears in ruling circles have run dry. On Wednesday Alan Bates himself revealed to the *Daily Telegraph* that he had rejected a “derisory” compensation offer from the government worth a sixth of what he requested, made 111 days after he had submitted his claim.

In 2019, a High Court ruling saw fewer than 600 postmasters receive just £20,000 each in compensation.

In 2022, the government established a new compensation scheme called the Group Litigation Order (GLO). This was supposedly to ensure that the High Court claimants would receive extra “full and fair compensation” to reflect their victory in court and their ongoing suffering. The GLO opened last year but such is the lack of faith among sub-postmasters that any justice will be forthcoming that 400 GLO members are still yet to make a claim under its terms.

In the words of Bates this week, “‘Full and fair’ might be His Majesty’s Government’s interpretation, but in reality the offer is derisory, offensive and after all this time, yes, cruel.”

“I will absolutely be turning this offer for financial redress down. It is just a terrible way to treat human beings—and I have heard from several sub-postmasters who have received similarly derisory offers, while others are still waiting.

“Bearing in mind my solicitors engaged forensic accountants to prepare my claim in accordance with established legal principles, it now seems we have to spend hours and hours over weeks and months with government-appointed lawyers at who knows what cost, just to point out these legal principles to them. But to them it might just be a good earner.”

He added, “I have been in the queue along with all the others in the scheme, but if my case is an example of the way they are going to treat all the cases, we may

as well start looking at a legal action again and let the judiciary decide.”

Bates and his partner, Suzanne, ran a shop with a Post Office counter in North Wales in 1998. He became suspicious of Horizon due to a shortage of £6,000 appearing on his books.

In 2003, Bates’ contract ended with the Post Office insisting that £1,200 was still unaccounted for. He was not prosecuted as his meticulous record-keeping proved, as the *Telegraph* noted, that “he was not at fault”. However, while still able to keep their shop, Bates and his partner lost their Post Office counter business and their life savings investment of around £60,000 they had put into the venture.

On Thursday, another victim of the Post Office—and successive governments which did everything to sweep the scandal under the carpet—came forward with more detail on the rock-bottom GLO compensation offers.

Christopher Head, one of the youngest sub-postmasters when he took over running a newsagents and sub-post office at West Bolden, Tyneside at age 18-years-old in 2006, revealed that he has been offered just £5,000. This is instead of the reputational damage of £75,000 being sought. The Post Office accused him of stealing more than £80,000.

Speaking to *MailOnline*, Head, now 36-years-old, said, “I didn’t expect the offer to be that bad. Had the Government come to the table with 50 percent, it would give an indication that they are maybe more serious. However, when you get 12 or 13 percent, you’ve got an uphill climb.” He added, “It certainly feels like a big game to the Government and it appears they don’t fully understand our circumstances especially when they said to me my offer ‘was fair and reasonable’. I feel [the compensation schemes] are just being dragged out and dragged out.”

While having to set aside a further £1 billion to deal with compensation claims, the government is ensuring that every penny is contested, no matter the human cost. This is done even after the deaths of 33 falsely convicted sub-postmasters, who went to their graves labelled as criminals.

Jo Hamilton, whose own story is featured in *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, described the latest compensation offers as “beyond disgusting”. She had herself initially received a “stupid offer” of compensation.

“They’ve done it to us all. They just come to us with these ridiculous offers. Nobody is asking for a fortune. What on earth are they playing at? ... I’ve had to fight for every penny, and I’m at the end of my journey now.”

The Post Office scandal reveals every venal characteristic of the stone-cold hearted British ruling class and its main political parties—Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat—who are all up their necks in the crimes against the sub-postmasters and the now decades-long denial of justice to them.

The government is the main shareholder in the Post Office. Last week the *Financial Times* revealed that even as the Post Office, Fujitsu and the government were reeling from the mass response to the *Mr Bates* drama, the Post Office was doing everything possible to make sure hundreds of its victims remained wrongly convicted criminals.

The newspaper reported, “The UK Post Office privately told ministers this month that it would have opposed appeals by nearly half of the 700 sub-postmasters convicted using data from Fujitsu’s faulty Horizon IT system.

“The message came days before Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced unprecedented legislation to acquit the sub-postmasters en masse...”

The letter stated, in reference to 333 cases, “On the information currently available... POL [Post Office Limited] could not properly concede an appeal unless further information becomes available.”



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