

UK Labour government continues to deny justice for Horizon Post Office scandal victims

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“I think for the Post Office scandal, the immediate priority is quashing the convictions, getting the compensation to those that are entitled to it as quickly as possible.” Sir Keir Starmer, January 2024

The Labour government has been in power 10 months and still there are hundreds of outstanding compensation claims that have not been paid to the victims of the Horizon Post Office scandal.

Between 1999 and 2015, the Post Office prosecuted 736 sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses—an average of one a week—for accounting errors caused by a faulty IT system named Horizon, provided to the Post Office by Fujitsu. This was despite sub-postmasters and mistresses complaining about bugs in the Horizon system after it reported shortfalls of many thousands of pounds.

Hundreds were sent to prison, and many were financially ruined. At least 251 have died before any full reckoning has taken place.

Following years of Conservative government inaction in failing to compensate the victims of the scandal, mass popular outrage at the injustice was sparked by the dramatization of the events by ITV in January last year of *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*. The response rocked the Conservative government who within weeks were forced to pass legislation quashing the wrongful conviction of hundreds of innocent sub-postmasters, and announce that compensation would be expedited.

By the time the Conservatives were voted out of office last July, many sub-postmasters were still waiting for compensation and justice.

In opposition, Sir Keir Starmer sought to make political capital out of the crisis even though the Labour Party was implicated in the injustice.

In response to the ITV drama Starmer said the victims had suffered a “huge injustice”, and “the immediate priority is quashing the convictions, [and] getting the compensation to those that are entitled to it as quickly as

possible.”

These words ring hollow to the thousands of sub-postmasters still awaiting compensation. Among these is Betty Brown, who at 92 is the oldest victim of the Horizon scandal. Betty has rejected the latest slightly increased offer of compensation, telling the BBC the offer “is still not good enough”. She had been offered less than a third of what she had originally claimed following a revised offer that had been increased from 29 percent to 60 percent.

Betty ended up being forced out of the Post Office branch she had worked at in County Durham in 2003, following her and her late husband having to pay out £50,000 of their life savings to cover shortfalls that did not exist. They ended up having to sell the Post Office that had been one of the most successful in the area, at a loss. Betty told the BBC “we’re just getting fobbed off, the evidence is all there”.

Shazia Saddiq, also awaiting compensation, was offered just 10 percent of her claim. She ran three Post Offices in Newcastle-upon Tyne, but ended up losing everything. This led to her having to move away because she had been assaulted in the street as a result of the postmasters being stigmatised as criminals.

Another victim is Terry Walters, who died in February 2025 after suffering years of ill health. Terry was one of the former sub-postmasters who had taken the Post Office to court in a legal action led by another sub-postmaster Alan Bates. Bates led 555 sub-postmasters to victory in the High Court in 2019 and has called for those responsible to be prosecuted.

Terry had applied for compensation over a year ago, yet died without receiving all the money he was owed. His widow Janet received a letter days after his death with an offer of compensation well below what the couple had initially claimed.

Janet described the offer as a “slap in the face”, adding

“enough is enough”.

Terry took over the Hockley Post Office in Stockport using his redundancy money. As a result of the faulty Horizon system, he was suspended and accused of shortfalls of thousands of pounds leading to him being dismissed. Terry and Janet had to sell their home and ended up living in rented accommodation.

The Labour government drags its feet even after Bates wrote to Starmer in November 2024—five months after Labour were elected—demanding that a deadline be met of March 2025 for compensation for sub-postmasters. In January this year Bates appeared alongside former sub-postmistress and campaigner Jo Hamilton before the Business and Trade committee to answer questions on the delays experienced by victims of the various compensation schemes. He said schemes were bogged down in bureaucracy, and included “shifting goalposts” within the “guidance and principles”.

Many of the schemes established to administer compensation were set up and controlled by the Post Office.

Following the passing of the March deadline Bates said it was time for victims to take the government to court. Such was the delay, he noted, that it could take up to 2027 before all the claims are completed based on the current rate of progress.

Bates sent an email to members of campaign group Justice For Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA) saying that the group litigation order (GLO) scheme—set up to achieve redress for the 555 claimants who took the Post Office to the High Court between 2017 and 2019—was a “mess”.

He advised, “There may be other options but the one which is repeatedly mentioned is a judicial review, not just for the GLO scheme but to include all of the schemes to ensure there is parity in the way victims have, and are, being treated.

“Returning to the courts may seem to be a long haul, but it will probably be (the) quickest way to ensure fairness for all.”

He added: “I do know many of you who have already settled have done so out of desperation or despair or because you have been backed into a corner to accept an offer.

“Well a new legal action may well be a way of having your claim reassessed once more, this time by the courts.”

There are currently four major schemes set up to look at financial redress for victims, but all are premised on any compensation being dependent on the specific

circumstances of the claimant. Claimants using the Horizon Shortfall Scheme (HSS) are provided no legal advice when completing the questionnaire that acts as the gateway to the scheme. MPs have admitted that this acts against them receiving the full redress they are due.

Speaking to the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee in January, Neil Hudgell, a solicitor representing some victims told the committee that there were “fundamental” concerns with the HSS.

Labour’s refusal to move as “quickly as possible” (Starmer) to compensate victims continues even after the Committee repeated its call for the Post Office to be removed from the running of the HSS and demanded an “explicit overriding instruction” to lawyers to assess claims quickly and give applicants the benefit of the doubt in terms of evidence of losses provided.

While the victims are treated like dirt, Fujitsu—whose faulty software was responsible for the crisis—continue to be flooded with tens of millions of pounds from their ongoing contracts from the Post Office.

The *i* newspaper revealed in February that the Post Office signed a contract with Fujitsu to continue using the Horizon software system until March 2026 at a cost of £40.8 million. When the contract was made public earlier in April it was revealed that this included a further £21 million paid to Fujitsu to cover the costs of further upgrades to the Horizon system. According to a Freedom of Information request last year more than £68 million was paid to Fujitsu to maintain and operate the system that included payments of £11 million between January and March 12 this year.

The Post Office has pledged to implement a lower risk, better value branch IT for Postmasters but has not revealed if the contract with Fujitsu will be extended beyond 2026.



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