

The treatment of Alan Bates: Justice denied, compensation slashed for victims of Post Office scandal by Starmer government

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The shameful treatment of Sir Alan Bates—who undertook a 20-year campaign to expose one of the largest miscarriages of justice in British legal history—has stripped away the smoke and mirrors of the Labour government’s pledge of “justice” for the victims of the Post Office Horizon scandal.

Bates has revealed that the compensation offer he received from the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) amounts to just under half—49.2 percent—of his original claim. The leader of the campaign that brought to light the frame-up of over 900 sub-postmasters and postmistresses has been handed a “take it or leave it” ultimatum by the very state that destroyed so many lives.

The scandal saw hundreds of sub-postmasters falsely accused of theft and fraud due to faults in the Horizon IT system, developed by Fujitsu and rolled out by the Post Office. Many were prosecuted, bankrupted, imprisoned, and some driven to suicide. The full scale of this industrial scale frame-up—carried out by a public institution with the connivance of the state and judiciary—was exposed in painstaking detail thanks to the unrelenting fight of Bates and his sub-postmaster colleagues.

The ITV drama *Mr. Bates vs the Post Office* brought the issue into millions of homes last year, triggering public outrage. The show won in several categories, including best Limited Drama award at this month’s BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) ceremony—with Alan Bates joining the production team and actors on stage.

In his acceptance speech producer Patrick Spence declared, “This story only had the impact it did because the people that watched it stood up and demanded action with rage.” Lead actor, Toby Jones previously said of its impact, “In most of the political upheavals in history, not

least ancient Greece and revolutionary Russia, drama has been at the centre of political change...”

Public anger remains high, but those in power holding the purse strings—first Conservative and now Labour governments—have been determined to grind down and betray those who have fought for justice and compensation.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer rushed to publicly embrace Bates following the drama’s broadcast, describing the scandal as a “huge injustice” and promising urgent action. That was in January last year when the Tories were still in office and Starmer was leader of the opposition. Labour came to office last July and Bates wrote to Starmer in November demanding a compensation deadline of March 2025. That deadline has passed, and the victims are still waiting, with Bates belatedly made an insulting offer.

In office for a nearly a year the cover-up and stonewalling continues under Labour.

In the *Sunday Times* last week, Bates denounced the government’s promise to take a “non-legalistic” approach to compensation as “worthless.” He wrote, “The sub-postmaster compensation schemes have been turned into quasi-kangaroo courts in which the Department for Business and Trade sits in judgment of the claims and alters the goalposts as and when it chooses.”

This is yet another example of the avarice and stone-cold heart of the British ruling class. The same apparatus that presided over the frameup of sub-postmasters is now administering the compensation process—ensuring victims are denied what they are owed.

The civil service is an essential component of the capitalist state, shielded from accountability and armed with limitless mechanisms to delay, deflect and deny. No one is being held to account for the decades-long

conspiracy between the Post Office, Fujitsu, the courts, the police, and successive governments. Compensation is being treated as a liability to be minimised.

Sub-postmasters are being asked to provide documentary evidence from two decades ago. The DPP had conveniently forgotten that many sub-postmasters were locked out of their offices because their contracts were wrongly terminated, losing access to any possible documentation they could have relied on in their defence.

The compensation schemes are a trap. Claimants are offered a fixed sum of £75,000, or the option to pursue a higher figure through a Kafkaesque process. The first hurdle is a departmental review. If that fails, a supposedly independent panel steps in. If that too disappoints, only then can claimants appeal to Sir Ross Cranston, the scheme's "independent reviewer"—a retired judge.

Christopher Head was suspended when he was just 18 years old and accused of stealing £80,000. He was initially offered 35 percent of his claim. After appealing to the panel, the amount was slashed to 23 percent. "Ridiculous," he said. Head now faces a terrible choice: accept the insult, or risk losing it all by taking it back to the panel, where the result would be binding.

As of March 2025, of the 446 claims paid out 155 were capped at the miserable £75,000 threshold. Many like Bates remain locked in disputes. The government has allocated £1.8 billion for compensation, but only £499 million has been paid—28 percent.

The House of Commons report—*Post Office and Horizon scandal redress: Unfinished business*—admits that "the schemes are so poorly designed that the application process is akin to a second trial for victims."

The miscarriages of justice began in 1999, with the Horizon systems launch under Tony Blair's New Labour government. Labour rubber-stamped the Post Office's aggressive expansion of Horizon's use, then shielded it from scrutiny. As problems piled up with the faulty IT system, Labour ministers looked the other way as sub-postmasters were scapegoated.

Between 1999 and 2010, sub-postmasters were prosecuted under a Labour government that prioritised contracting out services to private tech companies like Fujitsu under the pretext of "modernisation."

Today, Starmer's government continues the lie that the state can police itself. The DBT is still in charge of the schemes. The judiciary that oversaw the prosecutions is still trusted to arbitrate redress.

Starmer was the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) at the Crown Prosecution Service from 2008 to 2013

before entering parliament. He never lifted a finger to challenge any of the frameups of sub postmasters with a least 27 cases brought against them when he headed the DPP.

He leads a government spearheading a major state clampdown on free speech, criminalising protests over the Gaza genocide, and has launched a massive police operation against 350 striking bin workers in Birmingham.

The failure of a 70-year-old knighted campaigner like Bates—the subject of a BAFTA-winning drama eliciting an outpouring of public sympathy—to secure fair compensation after decades of injustice is a wake-up call.

The state—including the government, judiciary and civil service—is a tool of the ruling class, impervious to democratic pressure and indifferent to suffering. As the WSWs wrote on the whitewash of the preventable deaths of 72 victims of the Grenfell Tower fire:

"The Grenfell inquiry joins a long tradition of the British state using such inquiries to whitewash its crimes and deny justice to its victims, including at Aberfan (1966), Hillsborough football stadium (1989), and more recently in the contaminated blood cover-up and Horizon Post Office scandal for which no-one has been held to account."

The continued agony of the sub-postmasters makes clear that nothing is ever given up without it being forcibly torn from the British ruling elite by the working class. And whatever tactical retreats the ruling class may have to make, behind the scenes they are always plotting their next assault. Workers must display the same degree of ruthlessness to their class enemy and its state apparatus.



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