

WITNESS: JANET SKINNER

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0126_01

EXHIBITS: None

DATED:...16 February 2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF JANET SKINNER

I, Mrs Janet Skinner, will say as follows:

1. My employment with the POL began in 1994 as a counter clerk, I loved this job every day was a different day. I just never expected it to end in the way it did, made to believe I was the only one with balancing issues, with me in jail and branded a thief with a lifelong disability problem.
2. Between 1 January 2004 and 31 January 2005, I made 116 calls to the National Business Support Centre (the "Horizon helpline"). There was no investigation of those calls. I was ignored completely. I was always ignored by the Post Office, treated as a thief and a liar. Treated as a common criminal by that organisation and its legal advisors, from 2006, when I was 35 until 23rd April 2021. But I know who the real criminals are.
3. So, 15 years of my life were ruined. And I want to say to the Inquiry that this, for me, is a life sentence, I'm disabled and partly paralysed. I'll never recover fully. That is what POL, and its lawyers did to me.
4. It wasn't until I received a letter requiring me to attend court in 2006 that I understood I was being charged with theft and false accounting. I was advised to

plead guilty to false accounting – so that that the theft charge would be dropped, and I'd be less likely to receive a custodial sentence - I did. I was given a nine-month custodial sentence. Once the Judge had passed sentence Post Office legal team requested the theft charge to be left on file against me.

5. The minute I heard the gate lock in the court room, the fear of going to jail set in. I was taken downstairs into a holding cell, but I don't remember a great deal apart from crying. I then remember being taken out in hand cuffs into a transporter, this was really happening. I felt like I was watching someone else's horror story, not mine. I had done nothing wrong, yet I'm going to jail.
6. After arriving in jail, I was fingerprinted, had photos taken and was made to strip and squat behind a shower curtain, I was distraught. I was then placed on suicide watch for a week because of my emotional state of mind. I was allowed one phone call on the night which I made to my children, but my daughter was so distraught she couldn't speak to me. I didn't allow either of my children to visit me in prison. Prison was the one memory I could protect my children from having to relive, a extremely difficult decision to make but the best one for them both.
7. I was released in April 2007 after two and half months, on good behaviour, but I had to wear an ankle tag . I was completely ashamed I lived in long trousers until it was removed. I was ashamed to say/give my full name if anyone asked in-case someone recognised me. For many years I have had to feel shame for being in jail (people believe, you don't go to jail for nothing), but also knowing, I had done nothing wrong.
8. Here is the problem, POL is (well it was) a British trusted brand with very deep pockets. It was a huge fight for me to convince anyone I had done nothing wrong.

9. As I still had to pay "compensation" to the Post Office, I lost my home I shared with my children in 2007. We were forced into private rented accommodation.
10. During 2008 after attending court again on numerous occasions for not being able to make payments of compensation to the Post Office, which at this point wanted me to be sent to prison for a maximum term of five years. Fortunately, the judge was satisfied with me, I had nothing to give. POL had already left me with nothing. A couple of weeks later my physical health took a turn for the worst.
11. My immune system attacked itself causing paralysis from the neck down. Doctors told me I would never walk again. Although I fought back and learned to walk again, I'm still left with a great deal of physical difficulties. I will never be physically well enough to work as I remain disabled, and my nervous system is permanently damaged. So, from the time I was wrongly accused, charged prosecuted and jailed, the Post Office and its lawyers (who ought to be in jail) ruined my life. Do they care, I doubt they even know who I am. The only good thing I have learnt from this, is I'm not the only whose life POL and its legal teams have destroyed. Receiving a generic letter of sorry from Tim Parker for the POL past failings doesn't under any circumstances make this over for any victim/survivor.
12. People need to be held to account for the failings over the past two decades. The Post Office has said it is sorry for "historical failings". This may be yesterday's history for them, but this will be a part of me for the rest of my days, this is a life sentence. Sorry for their failings will never take away my memories.
13. These are some of the points I would like to make sure the Inquiry is aware of. One or two I'd like to ask the past and present directors of Post Office, of Fujitsu

and their lawyers – face to face would be fine with me. Alternatively, I'd like Sir Wyn to ask on my behalf.

- i) Why are the Chairman, the CFO and senior non-executive director of POL still in place? Their brand is trashed, and POL is apparently technically insolvent. The fact these people are still there (and each has been there or at least five years) is the most common comment which keeps coming up. Why is it that them in high positions always walk away with a pay incentive (when I went to jail because of one Post office) where is the justice in this. Having the responsibility of over 11.500 offices and then ending up in the UK's biggest miscarriage of justice and they've got away with it, like so many others since about 2000. Some lawyers apparently even boasted about what they did to us.
- ii) One of the reasons I am doing this is to make sure the Post Office Scandal stays in the spotlight. Too many people still don't know about it and too many people think something like this could never happen to them. I thought it could never happen to me. It wouldn't have happened if POL, Fujitsu and some of the lawyers hadn't lied, and covered up so many documents for so long and then (even at the end of 2020), tried to get my two barristers kicked off the case. They tried their hardest to discredit my legal team for uncovering POL coverups and lies.
- iii) POL, through some of its directors, CEOs, senior executives and some of its internal and external lawyers did some terrible things to hundreds of people over 20 years or more. Even at the very last minute in November 2020 they tried to make sure the whole truth was kept hidden. If it hadn't been for my legal team, it is quite possible that the Clarke Advice from 2013

- including the correspondence about “shredding documents” might have stayed hidden.
- iv) POL went after hundreds of us – more than 700 over 14 years, when it knew, or ought to have known, we had done nothing wrong. Why aren't the police, the regulators, looking at all those people. If they are, they aren't telling anyone about it. Some of the regulators have told us that either they can't or won't comment or they can't or won't do anything until this Inquiry is over. Why is that?
- v) These people don't understand and probably don't care about me or any of us. I mean the directors, the computer people, the lawyers, and some Ministers certainly around the time of the investigations which were stopped by POL many years ago. They should all be here to face us. They tried to destroy us, and in some cases, they actually drove people to suicide or early death.
- vi) The Court of Appeal said, “Post Office Limited's failures of investigation and disclosure were so egregious as to make the prosecution of any of the 'Horizon cases' an affront to the conscience of the court.” And POL is owned by BEIS with BEIS directors on it. This was Limb 2 of our appeals – which only Seema Misra, Tracy Felstead and I pushed for, when everyone else said “don't”. And we won.
14. My experience described briefly in this note, is available on two *Guardian* podcasts where I discussed this with Anushka Asthana. I explain in horrible detail what happened to me; I very much hope that Sir Wyn and his team will listen to them. Maybe, too, the Inquiry can play it to witnesses from POL, Fujitsu and their

lawyers. Because I still don't believe any of them understand, they never will, never want to.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/may/10/exposin-g-the-great-post-office-scandal-part-1>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/may/11/the-post-office-scandal-part-2>

15. I would also ask you to read the following pages from Nick Wallis book: pages 393/394/395.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Sign: 

Print full name: JANET SKINNER

Dated: 16 - 2 - 2022