

Alan Bates post Portcullis meeting

ALAN BATES: Yeah, near as damn it, you know, despite everybody having a go at them, you know, and Paula saying how much they were bending over backwards to do everything possible and they spent a fortune, and these people are thinking they're getting £13 million, you know.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah, yeah.

ALAN BATES: You know where it came from, don't you? So, I mean, that's basically it.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: I got there at 4, saw the MP for 4.30, and then we're all there till 6, and then we broke up--

RON WARMINGTON: Okay, so --

ALAN BATES: -- and I got away for 7.10. That should (unclear).

RON WARMINGTON: Shit. You should get a bloody -- you should get a chauffeur-driven limo all the way home and charge it to me and I'll reimburse you. What -- of the people present, who was the most aggressive, Bridgen(?) or Wood?

ALAN BATES: It's -- I mean, everybody sort of had a go, but they don't understand it very well, do they? Let's be fair. And they can't always phrase the question where it will do most damage.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: And they -- and do you know what Angela and Chris are like?

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: And Paula's very greasy.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: I mean --

RON WARMINGTON: So do you reckon --

ALAN BATES: Out of all of them, I suppose -- I mean, Oliver Letwin, who was picking up -- he was getting a bit too much into detail. He was picking up about the cases -- the amount of cases that are actually being put through in the sense, you know, if Second Sight recommended them, why didn't they go for mediation? Why were they being --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah, yeah.

ALAN BATES: You know, he really did eventually pick up on the point I was harking away at, about the working group getting involved and it being used as a filter --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- in some of the cases.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: So it did sort of go that way. But, I mean -- there was a lot to-ing and fro-ing, we never got very deep into it. Paula was upset some of the tweeting she was at the meeting and, "I know all about confidentiality", loads of moans about all that.

RON WARMINGTON: Tweeting? What tweeting? What, tweeting's going on in the --

ALAN BATES: There was tweeting, I believe. Paula said that she'd tweeted -- Paula tweeted that she was going to be at this meeting today. I don't know. I don't do tweets, so I don't know what it is. It's something that's upset her.

RON WARMINGTON: Well, it seemed to me the least well-kept secret in the universe that she was going to --

ALAN BATES: Yeah, well, I think -- I think James managed to dispel the fact that it was top secret.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: So there were so many points we never even got to which we should have discussed, so --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- at the end of the day it's total intransigence, they're just not going to move, they're just -- you know, "Oh, well, you know, we're spending so much time with reams of paper and the amount of investigation." You know all this crap, you can imagine --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah, yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- that came through about how wonderful a job -- I mean, I think --

RON WARMINGTON: Was Janet there?

ALAN BATES: Oh, Janet sat behind, yeah, she was taking notes and that.

RON WARMINGTON: And was Kay there?

ALAN BATES: No.

RON WARMINGTON: Okay, right.

ALAN BATES: No -- well, Kay wasn't invited. In fact,

it was only meant to be Paula, even Angela, later on, and James, but it sort of grew in numbers. In fact, they -- I think James didn't know or Janet didn't know that all the rest of the Post Office team was turning up until sort of mid-morning.

RON WARMINGTON: No.

ALAN BATES: So -- but --

RON WARMINGTON: And presumably Paula was a bit shocked that you were there and that the other MPs were there?

ALAN BATES: Oh, yeah. The five of us were sat at the table when they came in, and obviously had been there for a while.

RON WARMINGTON: 5-a-side football, yeah. Okay, right.

ALAN BATES: So, it was -- well, I --

RON WARMINGTON: And so was there no -- was there a -- so then it broke up. You didn't have a post-mortem with the MPs?

ALAN BATES: Well, no. I sort of -- I lingered when Paula and her team left, obviously I didn't want to go with them.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: I think Mike Wood stayed there and James --

RON WARMINGTON: Because you realise I'd had about -- the better part of three quarters of an hour on the phone with Mike this morning.

ALAN BATES: Yeah, I know. And, I mean, you know, they -- they were looking at me in the same way as me -- just basically they just not give a shit. They just don't understand is their -- was their sort of summary of it. They have no idea.

And someone -- I think it was Richard actually -- mentioned about the BBC, but that didn't seem to come as a shock to --

RON WARMINGTON: No. Well, funny enough, one of the PAs called me today and he'd had a call from the BBC as well.

ALAN BATES: Yeah. So I think that's becoming a bit more public, what's going on, on the Beeb's side there.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: James mentioned about how much pressure all the MPs were under about this. Post Office -- what's his name? Mark whatever, the muppet from their head of communications.

RON WARMINGTON: Oh, Mark --

ALAN BATES: He was on about, "Oh, well, you know, there's so little we can say, you know, because it's all confidential."

You know this working group thing.

RON WARMINGTON: Ah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALAN BATES: That's their position on all of this and it seems to be going that way.

RON WARMINGTON: How very convenient.

ALAN BATES: Yes, it is, it's very convenient that.

Oh, just trying to think, sort of wrapping it up, I think one of the big points that I was pushing -- I mean, it took forever to get it -- to understand about the fact of the working group being used a filter, and I think it was something Oliver Letwin kept saying about it, Post Office objecting to things going to mediation when Second Sight had recommended them. You know, in that case, obviously their role is to recommend. And

I think others caught on to the logic of what's the point of Second Sight being there. I think Mike Wood said, "Well, what's the point of Second Sight being there if you're not using their report?"

You know --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- (unclear) independently.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: And I think Angela was sort of -- couldn't really answer that. She was going, "Well, uh, and" -- but never really got an answer out of that one. But that one did put them a bit on the back -- it's obvious as well, you know. But I think -- yeah, I mean, James asked Paula whether they would be I think more relaxed about letting the cases go into mediation. I don't think it really helped anyway.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: They're going with the attitude they're going --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- or even turning them down individually. It doesn't help anyway.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: But he asked her to have a -- you know, would she be prepared to -- and she wanted to discuss it with her team, and which James sort of agreed to, "Yes, I can understand that, but you've got to" -- he said, "You've got to understand that the media are pressing on all of this now, so could you let me know by Wednesday."

And she goes, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, no, it's

going to have to go to the board, all this as well."

And -- and then she was pushed on when there was a board meeting, which is next week, which (unclear) time to put it on the agenda.

RON WARMINGTON: Oh?

ALAN BATES: But, you know, loads of rubbish going on there, you know.

So, anyway, she's going to do her best to try and get this onto the board meeting for next week, like it will make a difference.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah. Yeah, well, they'll just brush it aside, give it about five minutes and tell her to get on with it and bury it. Right.

ALAN BATES: Exactly, yeah.

RON WARMINGTON: All right, well --

ALAN BATES: So that's where we're up to. So (unclear) basically that's it in a nutshell.

RON WARMINGTON: Well, unless we'd been smoking dope, we wouldn't have expected her to go in there and roll over, would we?

ALAN BATES: Oh, never expected it. I mean, you know, I think even James was laying down how serious it was and, "We're at the end of the road," and all this sort of thing, you know. So that point's been made quite plain to them. And he'd let on to them something I told him in secret, that we're -- about the legal action we were looking at at the moment, the --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- with the lawyers this afternoon before I went there.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: And we're getting a lot closer on all of that now and we just have to see what happens. But, I mean, the minute we stick in a -- what is it? The minute we go from the High Court writ --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: -- the game's over.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: But I don't know how far we are from that, with -- you know, according to the lawyers, the sooner we do it the better, but --

RON WARMINGTON: Really? Okay.

ALAN BATES: But they're a big firm and they're into the group actions and --

RON WARMINGTON: Well, I would have thought that your strategy was correct, which is to say, "Look, you know" -- well, you haven't said this but I'm now going to say it. I think we're painting them right into a corner now. They're now locked in on the fact that we haven't condemned Horizon and there's no --

ALAN BATES: Oh, yeah, I mean, I asked Paula -- it's funny, she went on about there was no flaws in Horizon and all the rest of it.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: Then when I had a chance to ask her a question, I said. "Paula. What do you understand to be the Horizon System?"

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: Because I had a little quote in there from the (unclear).

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah. Yeah, because -- and I sort of said to Mike this morning, I said, "Whenever she says 'we haven't found any problems with Horizon', surgically remove the term 'Horizon' in your mind and replace it with Post Office.

ALAN BATES: Post Office, yes.

RON WARMINGTON: -- and see how it computes and it won't do because they're basically saying Post Office is not at fault. They're essentially saying there is no flaw pointed out to us by Second Sight in the Horizon software and that that's not good enough, you know. And the whole business about errors made at the counter, I'm saying it's down to inadequate error (unclear). Even if the system was serviceable and fit for purpose, they've actually rendered it unfit by changes they've made subsequently. All right.

ALAN BATES: It was very hard to have, you know, a decent conversation in there. Mind you, our lawyers want that part 2 report as soon as possible, needless to say --

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah. Well, you know, frankly, you've got to hang in because if you don't --

ALAN BATES: I know, I know --

RON WARMINGTON: -- wait until December --

ALAN BATES: -- I know. It's the balance, Ron. Look, I mean, I'm being -- I'm being -- you know, I'm being pulled one way by another --

RON WARMINGTON: Now, and --

ALAN BATES: -- and explaining things possibly that way --

RON WARMINGTON: Tell him to call me about it because if you -- of you go for a legal action before --

ALAN BATES: Too early.

RON WARMINGTON: -- before we've got all the PORs in, we will never be able to write a report saying that we've had answers to all the issues raised. We've got to give them the opportunity to provide answers to all of the issues raised and if we don't, you'll never really have their stated position on the point.

ALAN BATES: Well, I've got the lawyers going over on at me about limitations, limitations, statute of limitations, all this sort of thing --

RON WARMINGTON: Well ...

ALAN BATES: -- (unclear) cases. I tell them --

RON WARMINGTON: Tell them --

ALAN BATES: -- (unclear) to worry about. I don't think it's going to make a huge difference one way or another.

RON WARMINGTON: Tell them to solve that separately and just say --

ALAN BATES: Yeah, because they say they can extend that these days.

RON WARMINGTON: Well, then they bloody well need to because don't use that as an excuse because you're within now two months of getting the last POR in. You know, the last one's due -- it's.

ALAN BATES: I know, I know, I know --

RON WARMINGTON: 22nd. It's a month away. You know, go -- bloody well --

ALAN BATES: A lot of balancing going on here.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah. Well, wait another month.

ALAN BATES: We won't -- no, I'm not going to act--
we're not going to act quickly --

RON WARMINGTON: And if you want to -- you know, if you
want to fire us, fire us. You know, great. You
know, but you know don't, for Christ's sake, expect
Ernst & Young or PricewaterhouseCoopers to do it
because --

ALAN BATES: I don't want to fire you. I have no reason
to fire you. No, it's --

RON WARMINGTON: But I'm --

ALAN BATES: -- it's Post Office who'll fire you and
I don't think they'd dare do that actually --

RON WARMINGTON: I'm glad --

ALAN BATES: (Unclear) yesterday(?) --

RON WARMINGTON: -- I'm glad you raised the question
what's the point of them because if we're writing
reports and then basically Tony's having to do the
whole lot again and so are you, I mean, it's
ridiculous. Everything we do, Post Office is doing,
perhaps some advisors are having to do it --

ALAN BATES: Well, I said, you know, why didn't we just
take on the case ourselves against Post Office, the
proper table in that case, having investigated the
case.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah, you --

ALAN BATES: What's the point of Second Sight?

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah. You --

ALAN BATES: The logic was there. Anyone could follow
that.

RON WARMINGTON: It would have been better actually if

you'd been the hirer of Second Sight and -- well, actually what would have been better there should have been an independent party and I'm surprised -- surprised Bridget(?) didn't raise that again.

ALAN BATES: I always wanted BEIS to take this on board.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: It shouldn't have been Post Office in there.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah.

ALAN BATES: And I put my hand in endless times.

RON WARMINGTON: Well, and I --

ALAN BATES: It should have been a totally separate client (unclear) the Post Office. It shouldn't have been --

RON WARMINGTON: And I had a go -- when Mike Wood got on to the touchy subject about the sort of -- the board taking appropriate action, I said, "Well, you can blame yourself" and certainly successive governments. You've -- your hands-off -- progressive governments hands-off, successive governments hands-off attitude. I said you wouldn't have got Dr Beeching doing this.

ALAN BATES: Yeah, I know.

RON WARMINGTON: You know, he would have chopped the whole lot out but, you know, this, this --

ALAN BATES: I know.

RON WARMINGTON: -- this doing away with the shareholder group, which would normally hold the board to account and can fire the board, is a big mistake.

ALAN BATES: Funny enough, when we were in with the MPs before Post Office turned up, they were all -- I can't remember who it was but one of them said, "Right, we need to get rid of the bloody lot of

them".

RON WARMINGTON: Well, that would be my -- that would be my~--

ALAN BATES: (Unclear) that's what you said to them.

RON WARMINGTON: Yeah, that's what I said.

ALAN BATES: (Unclear)

RON WARMINGTON: I said fire the whole bloody board and get rid of them. You need -- it's like Stygian's stables(sic). You need to bloody divert the bloody course of the Thames and send it through Old Street.

ALAN BATES: Okay. Well, it's just -- it was mean to be a quick call --

RON WARMINGTON: Thank you very much.

ALAN BATES: -- but anyway, I'll let you know and no doubt we'll speak in a few days.

RON WARMINGTON: Well, I hope you get ...

(Recording ends)