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Postmasters on Post Office board 'ignored and unwanted'

Voice of persecuted workforce complained days before Henry Staunton's sacking as chairman

[Tom Witherow](#)

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Saf Ismail and Elliot Jacobs were elected to the Post Office board in 2021. Both now seem to be in revolt

Postmasters serving on the Post Office board complained they were “ignored and unwanted” in the days before Henry Staunton was sacked as chairman, according to a leaked memo.

Elliot Jacobs, an award-winning postmaster who became a non-executive director, wrote that “the culture that PMs [postmasters] are ‘guilty’ and ‘on the take’ is embedded in this company”. He said that he and Saf Ismail, his fellow postmaster non-executive director, “continue to be ignored and seen by many as an annoyance”.

Jacobs claimed the company's investigations department was "out of control" and that 40 Post Office investigators still employed by the company were nicknamed "the untouchables" by Nick Read, the chief executive.

The leak came after Henry Staunton, the sacked chairman, gave an [explosive interview](#) to The Sunday Times claiming he was told to stall compensation to victims of the Horizon scandal to help the Conservatives' electoral hopes. He claimed that Kemi Badenoch, the business secretary, fired him by saying: "Well, someone's got to take the rap for this."

- **[Sacked Post Office chief 'was under investigation for bullying' Badenoch claims](#)**

Badenoch has accused Staunton, a former chairman of WH Smith, of giving "an interview full of lies" and pledged to give "the truth" to the House of Commons on Monday afternoon. The bombshell claims left the Post Office fighting a rearguard action to pacify postmasters.

In an email sent directly to the owner-managers of the network's 11,500 branches, Read placed the Post Office's selection of two sub-postmasters to the board as a central plank of his defence, saying they "enable your voices to be heard". However, the leaked memo suggests the two directors are in revolt.

"The culture that PMs [postmasters] are "guilty" and "on the take" is embedded in this company and whilst we continue to employ 40+ people who ensured [innocent people were found guilty](#) and who continue to believe that mantra, this will never change," wrote Jacobs, in a draft email for Read shared with other directors including Staunton on January 24.



Henry Staunton, who was sacked as chairman of the Post Office last month

JOSHUA BRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

“The investigations department is out of control,” he continued. “The way we treat PMs and investigate them needs a thorough and proper review — by a postmaster-run oversight committee. This business is supposed to be PM-centric — it isn’t. Now more than ever this is vital.”

He said that the term “untouchables”, used to describe the power held by up to 40 investigators who are still employed by the [Post Office](#), was used by Read himself. “The ‘untouchables’ (your words) who work in investigations investigate everything and everyone ... This is not a normal approach to governance or oversight,” he said.

The group includes individuals such as Stephen Bradshaw, who denied he and his colleagues “behaved like mafia gangsters” in evidence to [the Horizon IT inquiry last month](#).



Elliot Jacobs had written of his concerns the postmasters on the Post Office board were being ignored

The memo also revealed that Saf Ismail, the second postmaster on the board, had seen his email left unanswered for a week, with Jacobs commenting this “suggests we are not taken seriously nor being held in the same regard as other NEDs”.

On Twitter/X, Badenoch wrote: “The details will emerge soon enough as I won’t let the matter rest here, but will be discussing with govt lawyers. Henry Staunton had a lack of grip on getting justice for postmasters. The serious concerns over his conduct were the reasons I asked him to step down.”

The business and trade department also said Staunton was sacked for “blocking an investigation into his conduct” involving a whistleblower.



Saf Ismail, a non-executive director, is said to have had an email ignored for a week
More than 700 postmasters and sub-postmasters were wrongly prosecuted for theft and fraud offences

In his interview with The Sunday Times, Staunton said the Post Office was plagued by a “toxic” culture in which the suspicion that postmasters were “digging into the [till] drawers is rife”, and that the heavily delayed compensation schemes struck him as “terribly bureaucratic”, “terribly unsympathetic” and designed to make it [difficult to claim compensation](#).

On Monday morning, he told The Times: “It was in the interest of the business, as well as being fair for the postmasters, for there to be faster progress on exoneration, and that compensation was more generous, but we didn’t see any real movement until after the *Mr Bates* programme. I think it’s pretty obvious to everyone what was really going on.”

Jacobs declined to comment. Ismail was contacted for comment.

A Post Office spokesman said: “We appointed two democratically elected, serving postmasters to the board in 2021 precisely to bring their experience and perspective to the centre of our decision-making. Since 2019, we have made a number of changes to the culture of our business, seeking to put postmasters front

and centre, while fully acknowledging that there are more changes that need to be made.”