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Dear Ms Perry

In reply to your letter dated 1st May 2001 which really fails to meet many of the comments of my original letter and purely offers the standard responses, I would like to request further information.

Why is it that the majority of new services such as Photo on Licence and Passport Checking are always given to the Branch Offices as a matter of course, when it is the Branch Offices themselves which are losing nearly £1 million per week and so in reality are being subsidised by sub offices like ourselves? From the position of running a sub office it would seem that in such instances, even if it is not a policy, the reality of the situation seems to show that The Post Office is operating a restrictive practise in order to prop up the ailing part of the business, in this instance the Branch Offices. This is certainly not in the best interests of the customer and unlike the senior management I do spend considerable time with customers and I do have some understanding of their needs. Paragraph two of your letter states 'In an ideal world all post offices should be able to offer all products and services, unfortunately this practise is not cost effective,' so how is it cost effective to subsidise Branch Offices to the tune of £50 million per year?

In my original letter dated 1st February 2001 I pointed out that my office is growing the volume of its business month by month over previous years figures, but in real terms my income from the Post Office is reducing month after month. I presume that is either to prop up the Branch Office network or to try and recover some of the outrageous costs associated with the appalling disaster called Horizon. Before taking over this office three years ago I had spent many years working with new epos systems, both off the shelf and custom made and by comparison to what Horizon could have been, the current system is a joke. Speaking from the point of view of someone working on the counter, who has spent years working with effectives systems it is only too obvious that the system is overly complicated, slow and cumbersome. The totally inadequate report system has been made so complex it lacks the ability to interrogate the system when you know the information is inside. This is not only frustrating but causes hours of extra work for which again we do not get paid. The introduction of the system at this office has personally cost me between £1000-2000, but regardless of who you talk to nobody wants to know, it is always someone else's responsibility, never theirs!

There is no sign anywhere from any of the senior management of Post Office Network that they have a real grasp or experience of what happens at the counter. There are however plenty of words printed of how wonderful the future will be, but the future is here now and business is shrinking, and almost nothing has appeared on the counter to offset the loss.

When we took over the business three years ago, a condition imposed by POCL was to open lunchtimes and Wednesday afternoons, but the salary for the office was not increased to cover this. We were told the extra revenue generated during these periods would cover costs. Three years on and there is still no sign of this so called extra income as the reality is that business has just time shifted; Oh, we also have to redirect all the people wanting MVL's to the nearest Branch Office as all the surrounding sub offices which offer MVL's are closed on lunchtimes and Wednesday afternoons. These extra hours, nearly 500 over the year, have effectively reduced our salary an extra £2000 per year, but nobody wants to know or do something real to try and help!

Whilst I am commenting on the ways POCL bullies financial pressures onto a small business such as ours, there is the matter of the National Lottery Terminal at this office. This not only formed part of the contractual conditions for taking over the office which required us to stay open longer on Lottery night to provide the service, but also formed part of our income in our business plan. Within a few months of taking over the business and doubling the Lottery turnover, POCL came and took the terminal away as you felt you could make more money with it elsewhere, a sort of 'to hell with the contract we can do whatever we like, we're POCL' attitude, and again nobody wants to know!

Returning to your letter you state 'that 92% of the population in Britain were situated within 2 miles of an office offering the DVLA facility'. The 92% was achieved without Craig-y-don Post Office and presumably these offices also offer all other Post Office products. Therefore Post Office products would still be available to 92% of the population if Craig-y-don Post Office closed. So either make me an offer to close the Post Office side of my business and thereby increase the profitability of surrounding offices or provide me with the services my customers require and ensure the viability of this office. To let the situation fester on is not only poor management with an increasing financial burden for this and the other surrounding offices, but it also raises the question of the morality of Post Office Networks' actions.

I know your response to my queries and comments will be how you sympathise with my comments and how they have been forwarded to whoever, but at the end of the day, nobody will accept the responsibility to actually do something real and make a difference.

Yours sincerely

Alan Bates
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