

Dear Bhaskar

So, it is 5pm, Saturday September 22, and the Tribune relaunch will soon be underway. I'm sorry I was not able to accept your invitation to attend, but ...

Oh, sorry, that's right ... I wasn't actually invited to attend. In fact, I wasn't even informed of the relaunch event; I found out about it because I'm a journalist, and I do that kind of thing.

Let me mention a few things.

Although the recent history of Tribune seems to have been swept under the carpet in the run up to the relaunch, I would remind you that in fact Ian Herton, George Osgerby and I were producing Tribune until January 2018. We had been doing so in the most straitened circumstances, ridiculously poorly paid, with almost no resources or backroom support, effectively without an editor for more than two years, and using contributors who were willing to offer their work with little or no reward. Whatever shortcomings you or others may consider the product to have had, we kept the publication going and attempted to maintain the Tribune tradition as best we could.

We were aware that Chris McLaughlin had made contact with you and that you had expressed interest in taking on Tribune. We were led to believe that you wanted 'continuity' and that you would 'keep the team together'. When Owen Oyston pulled the plug, we were enthused by the prospect of Jacobin's involvement and sought to facilitate the transfer of the title both by persuasion and by putting pressure on Oyston through our financial claim via the NUJ. We did so in the belief that we would continue to be involved in a reconfigured Tribune.

On the one occasion you spoke to me during this period you said you liked my contributions to Tribune and wanted me to write for the relaunched mag. You suggested Ian, George and I would be involved in the planning for it. That there would be a meeting or meetings in the run-up to the relaunch in which you wanted us to participate. However, you also told us about the fact that in order to buy the magazine, Oyston wanted you to pay the amounts we were claiming from him, and you suggested that this would be possible if we took 70 per cent of what we were owed. We accepted this compromise in the belief that we would continue to be involved in Tribune and believing the promise that there would be work for us on the relaunched publication.

After Ian, George and I received the payment from you of our 70 per cent of what was owed by Oyston we heard practically nothing more from you, nothing from Ronan Burtenshaw and nothing coherent from Chris McLaughlin, who you had retained in some capacity. Almost everything we have learned about the future of Tribune has come third hand or through public sources. No meetings materialised. We were not asked to participate in any planning, nor invited to contribute. We were not informed of Ronan Burtenshaw's appointment as editor or what the editorial plans for Tribune were. It is almost as though, once we had been 'paid off', you had decided that we could comfortably be cast aside completely. Perhaps you suspected that if we had not received this false promise of involvement we would have been reluctant to accept that 70 per cent. To be honest, I suspect such suspicion would have been correct.

I did receive an email from you eventually, after my prompting, in which you said, 'I appreciate your competence and your work keeping Tribune afloat and I do apologize for my lapses in the

communication. But it is my hope to get you all involved with the project.' No invitation to 'get involved' has ever been received, apart from a later message from Ronan, again after some prompting, in which we were vaguely invited to make 'pitches' for future issues. Not exactly what we had been led to believe, at the beginning of this process, would be our role.

I also noted in your email that the new Tribune would have an advisory board to offer 'political and intellectual guidance' – also clearly not something to which you believe we could contribute.

So, I was effectively dumped once you had managed to acquire the magazine, and have, unfortunately, been unemployed since. I am not naïve. I understand that when a new proprietor takes over a publication, even a left-wing one, he/she may want a new direction and fresh blood. If you had said that from the beginning and not mislead us, you might have retained my support. What I object to, and what makes me very angry, is the dishonesty of the process in which you indulged and the disrespect you have shown myself and my colleagues

Now, though, at least we have something solid to look at, and the contents list contains barely a single previous contributor to Tribune that I recognise. (And though I know you were sent the contributors' details, I have not yet come across a single one who has been contacted by you.) It is ironic, in fact, that, apart from Mr McCluskey (and is he aware of how we have been treated?), the only familiar name on that contents list is the one who, despite being the nominal editor, contributed practically nothing of value to Tribune during the three and a half years I was working on it.

I wonder if, amidst no doubt stirring words this afternoon from usual suspects like Owen Jones, there will be any recognition of the efforts Ian, George and I made to keep Tribune going and facilitate Jacobin's acquisition of it. Somehow I doubt it. So often on the left, principles of comradeship, solidarity, honesty and so on make fine rhetoric but are shamelessly abandoned when they become inconvenient. I am not surprised by the way you have treated Ian, George and I – I have had worse experiences, not least at Red Pepper – but it's just as well that my capacity for disappointment in so-called 'democratic socialists' has not yet reached its limit.

Good luck.

Mike Parker

Dear Bhaskar

Good luck with the relaunch at the Momentum love-in.

I would have been there but wasn't invited, or even informed about it. I'm not sure whether that was a calculated insult or utter disdain for those who kept it going so that you would have something to buy.

I had sincerely hoped that the claims made some months ago by 'chri Tribune' that you never intended to honour your commitments – made both verbally and in emails – to the Tribune team were wrong. It now seems that, rare for him, he was right.

In the capitalist world someone who buys an ailing company and dumps its committed workers is known as an asset-stripper or robber baron, but at least they don't claim to be socialists.

When we spoke over the telephone I referred to an on-line interview with you in which you said you tried not to become the sort of editor/proprietor you despised. My advice to you is: try harder.

Yours,

Ian Herson

Dear Bhaskar,

I suppose I should congratulate you and your whole team (a number of whom have never before been involved with Tribune), and wish you well, all the best and good luck with the launch of 'first' edition of 'Tribune'.

I am saddened not to be participating, along with Ian, Mike and others who helped to keep Tribune going over many years (before the involvement of Owen Oyston in my case) for little or no payment. For this long association to end in the way it has is somewhat disappointing.

Maybe I misunderstood when you informed me in a telephone conversation several months ago that you would contact me in August with a view meeting up in that same month, and stated that you looked 'forward to collaborating with' me. I understand that you had similar exchanges with Ian and Mike.

I have been reflecting on what it actually might mean to be a 'democratic socialist'. You may be uninterested, but perhaps you will indulge me. All the pious, pseudo-academic waffle in the world doesn't really amount to a hill of beans. Our actions are what count. How we treat others is what matters.

Yours,

George Osgerby