

British media quick to dismiss death in Murdoch phone hacking case

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In an article posted July 20, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted the rush to judgement by the Hertfordshire Police in the UK, who issued an extraordinary statement declaring the death of former *News of the World* reporter Sean Hoare to be “unexplained but not thought to be suspicious”. This statement was made just hours after police arrived at Hoare’s home to discover his body and before a post-mortem had been conducted.

Hoare’s dead body was found on the morning of July 18 at 10:40 a.m. at his home in Watford, north of London, and his death was made public that evening. A reporter for the *Sun*, the *Sunday People* and the *News of the World* (2001-2005), Hoare broke silence on the illegal and corrupt practices at the latter publication. Specifically, he alleged that former editor Andy Coulson, who later became Prime Minister David Cameron’s director of communications, was fully aware of phone hacking that took place on an “industrial scale”.

In an interview with the *New York Times* last September, Hoare was the first former *News of the World* journalist to come out on the record, alleging that Coulson had known about the phone hacking and urged on the practice. Hoare told the *Times* that he and Coulson had first worked together on Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun*, where he had played tape recordings of hacked messages for Coulson. Hoare said he continued to inform Coulson of his activity at the *News of the World* and that the latter “actively encouraged me to do it”.

Hoare had recently told the BBC’s “Panorama” current affairs programme that Coulson had him hack phones and that the illegal practice was “endemic” at Murdoch’s *News of the World*.

Hoare was a News International (NI) insider of long standing who knew chapter and verse about the widespread use of phone hacking and other alleged illegal activities.

On Tuesday evening, the police maintained that there was “no evidence” of third-party involvement in Hoare’s death. This statement followed a post-mortem of Hoare’s body conducted earlier that day.

Despite the official claims to the contrary, the death of Hoare is being treated as possibly suspicious by the police and medical authorities. On the evening of his death, a police van marked Scientific Services Unit pulled up at the address, and later, three officers carrying cameras entered the building in white forensic suits.

The post-mortem of Hoare was a section 20 autopsy, which would ordinarily be used only in suspicious death cases.

In their statement, Hertfordshire police said the results of the post-mortem were “inconclusive”, and as yet no specific cause of death has

been provided by the police. The authorities are awaiting the results of histology and toxicology tests to establish a cause of death, and it is understood that these results will not be available for weeks. On July 21, an inquest was opened into Hoare’s death and adjourned as the coroner was still waiting to receive those same test results.

Under these conditions, with the cause of his death still unknown, and no facts surrounding Hoare’s death established, the *Independent* decided to publish an article Wednesday that rubbished any notion that the death could be considered in any way suspicious.

The article, “Was Sean Hoare killed by the Murdoch empire? The short answer is no”, by Martin Hickman, was published less than two days after the death was made public, and one must assume, as the article was published Wednesday, it was written even before the post-mortem statement by Hertfordshire Police had been released.

In his piece, Hickman adds Hoare’s name to a growing list of supposed imaginary “controversial deaths” being obsessed over by “conspiracy theorists”. He states that Hoare will now likely take his place alongside Princess Diana and Dr. David Kelly in this “roll call”.

A number of issues arise from these assertions. First, no one is asserting that Hoare was “killed by the Murdoch empire”. What is being suggested is that an inquiry into the causes of death of a man only 47 years old—and a central figure in the phone hacking scandal, where vast amounts of money and high-powered political careers are at stake—must be approached with some care and caution.

Yet Hickman’s article labels anyone who raises questions about Hoare’s death a “conspiracy theorist”. The piece states that “we do not yet have all the facts, but there are many reasons why Mr Hoare’s death presents no more of a conspiracy than the failure of Princess Diana to fasten her seatbelt while being driven through the Pont de l’Alma road tunnel in Paris in 1997”.

But the reality is not simply that “we do not yet have all the facts”. Hickman, like the rest of the media and the public, has *no* facts about Hoare’s death. Not a single fact has been made public.

Moreover, after stating there are “many reasons” why the death should not be viewed as suspicious or a “conspiracy”, the author lists just five. Critically, Hickman also minimises the significance of Hoare as a central figure in the ongoing and widespread political crisis engulfing Murdoch’s News International and the entire political establishment.

Hickman comments, “Mr Hoare was not in possession of unique information about the wrongdoing at the *News of the World*, nor was he

the only one to point the finger at Andy Coulson, its former editor". To bolster this claim he adds "The *New York Times* spoke to 12 current or former NOTW staff, who said hacking was rife".

Again, this is simply stacking the deck. Who claims that Hoare possessed "unique information"? What is beyond dispute, as many have noted, is that Hoare was the first journalist from within News International to go on the public record about the widespread illegal practises. The other journalists who spoke to the *Times* did so under conditions of anonymity.

Hoare also gave interviews to the *Guardian* and the BBC on the record. Earlier this month, he also told the *New York Times* about News International journalists making payments to the police, and about the use of "pinging"—locating people via their mobile phone signals, a technology supposedly used only for anti-terror purposes. Just before his death, he gave the *Guardian* further details about the use of ping.

Hickman's dismissive piece contradicts another article he had a hand in writing about Hoare's significance. An *Independent* column published Tuesday under the joint byline of Hickman and Cahal Milmo notes that Hoare "was the first News International journalist to allege that Andy Coulson had known about widespread phone hacking at the NOTW". Later, the authors write, "Mr Hoare's death means that *his in-depth knowledge of alleged illegality* at the defunct Sunday redtop will not be available to the public inquiry into illicit behaviour by the press, which was confirmed by David Cameron last week". [Emphasis added]

In his Wednesday article, Hickman informed his readers that "the (unspoken but tangible) suggestion that News International might want to send death squads scuttling round Britain to silence witnesses is absurd, and especially so given the trouble it already faces".

He then adds, "Notwithstanding its dark arts, deceit and links to criminals, NI's new strategy is PR-led; it wants to now co-operate with the police and apologise for the mess".

But while Hickman creates News International "death squads" to ridicule those who refuse to rule out the possibility of wrongdoing in Hoare's death, he cannot avoid making references to NI's "dark arts, deceit and links to criminals".

Hickman is well aware of the information surfacing regarding the extent of News International links to known criminals.

On July 6, Labour MP Tom Watson told Parliament that News International chief executive and former *News of the World* editor Rebekah Brooks "was present at a meeting with Scotland Yard when police officers pursuing a murder investigation provided her with evidence that her newspaper was interfering with the pursuit of justice".

"She was told of actions by people she paid to expose and discredit David Cook [a Detective Superintendent] and his wife Jackie Haines so that Mr. Cook would be prevented from completing an investigation into a murder".

Watson added, "News International was paying people to interfere with police officers and were doing so on behalf of known criminals. We know now that News International had entered the criminal underworld".

As stated earlier, there is yet no proof of any involvement of News International or anybody else in Hoare's death, as the facts have yet to be ascertained. However, in the face of facts such as those raised by Watson,

to make light of the "absurdity" of News International "death squads" roaming Britain to silence people is shoddy and irresponsible journalism.

Offering it as another reason why the public should supposedly reject the possibility of foul play in Hoare's demise, Hickman observes that the death is not being investigated by the Metropolitan [Greater London] Police "but by the Hertfordshire force, whose statement that the death was not thought to be suspicious was probably a disappointment to Hertfordshire's best detectives, who may have been only too keen to get one over on their big city colleagues".

This is ludicrous and simply not to be taken seriously.

It should also be noted that Hickman refers to the 2003 death of Dr. David Kelly, but has nothing to say about the still unexplained circumstances surrounding it. He states the Princess Diana "conspiracy" can be dismissed on the basis that she failed to fasten her seatbelt. But the questions surrounding Diana's death aside, a great deal of evidence has emerged that strongly suggests Kelly may have been murdered.

Kelly, a leading Ministry of Defence microbiologist and former senior United Nations weapons inspector in Iraq, had told BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan and other journalists about his concerns over the misuse of intelligence material concerning Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" by the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Many people are rightly suspicious of the official UK government inquiry verdict that Kelly committed suicide. Leading doctors in the UK, including Dr. Michael Powers QC, have challenged and continue to challenge these findings. On October 15, 2007, a Freedom of Information request revealed that the knife Kelly is supposed to have used to commit suicide had no fingerprints on it.

The Hickman piece includes only one substantive suggestion as to how Hoare could have died of natural causes. But this is based on the supposition and conjecture that Hickman supposedly dismisses as "conspiracy". Tucked away at the end of his article, the *Independent* journalist writes, "Mr Hoare was not in good health. He was reported to be looking yellow and his doctor had remarked that he should have been dead".

By all accounts, Hoare had been ill and suffered from years of alcohol and cocaine abuse, but he was in rehab. Had Hickman seen or spoken to Hoare recently? Had he spoken to Hoare's doctor?

It is hardly necessary for one to be a "conspiracy theorist" to understand there are conspiracies hatched at the highest levels of giant corporations and government.

The author recommends:

Why did UK police declare death of News of the World whistleblower "not suspicious?"
[20 July 2011]

Britain: Dr. David Kelly death evidence suppressed for 70 years
[27 January 2010]



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