

UK hacking scandal yields new reports of criminality by Murdoch press

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Revelations that former prime minister and chancellor Gordon Brown was targeted by private investigators working for the *Sun* and the *Sunday Times* have further damaged Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

The two newspapers are published by News International, News Corporation's UK subsidiary, extending the phone hacking scandal beyond the now defunct *News of the World*. Evidence has also emerged of the targeting of more members of the royal family, including the queen. Murdoch press employees allegedly bribed security officers working for the royals in an effort to obtain information.

The Brown revelations highlight the direct involvement of the police and the judiciary in covering up News International's illegal practices. Just prior to last year's general election, then-Prime Minister Brown had asked Scotland Yard, headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, if there was evidence that he had been targeted by private investigator Glenn Mulcaire, who was jailed in 2007 for hacking phones on behalf of *News of the World*. Brown was told there was no evidence.

But officers investigating phone hacking now say they have found mentions of Brown and his wife Sarah in notebooks seized from Mulcaire in August 2006. They claim the notebooks had not previously been examined.

The notebooks make clear that numerous journalists working for the Murdoch press repeatedly targeted Brown over a 10-year period, seeking to access his voice mail, bank accounts, legal files and medical records. The *Guardian* has reported that a private investigator "used a serving police officer to trawl the police national computer" for information about Brown.

Stories were run by the *Sun* in 2001 on how the Browns' first child, Jennifer, had suffered a brain haemorrhage. These appeared the weekend before the baby died.

In October 2006, the editor of the *Sun*, Rebekah Brooks, contacted the Browns to tell them that they were running a story after having obtained details from medical files that their four-month-old son, Fraser, was suffering from cystic fibrosis.

Abbey National Bank has revealed that financial details were provided on six occasions to a "blagger"—someone posing as Brown—while lawyers Allen & Overy were conned into handing over details from Brown's file to someone working for the *Sunday Times*.

In an interview Tuesday, Brown said, "I had my bank account broken into. I had my legal files effectively broken into. My tax returns went missing at one point. Medical records were broken into. I don't know how this happened.

"I do know that in two instances there is absolute proof that News International hired people to do this and the people who are doing this are criminals, known criminals in some cases with records of violence and fraud."

In 2003, Devon and Cornwall police discovered that one of their junior officers was providing information from the police national computer to a network of private investigators, including Glen Lawson of Abbey Investigations. This contact was used to search for information on Brown and two other MPs, Nick Brown and Martin Salter, on behalf of as yet unnamed journalists.

Hitherto unknown transcripts obtained by the *Guardian* "show that the search on Martin Salter was made at a time when the *News of the World*, then edited by Brooks, was attacking him for refusing to support the paper's notorious 'Sarah's law' campaign to name paedophiles."

The *Guardian* reports: "An attempt to prosecute this network was blocked by a West Country judge, Paul Darlow, who shocked police by ruling that it would be a misuse of public money to pursue the case."

Despite these revelations, the only consequence for Murdoch to this point has been to refer his efforts to secure full ownership of BSkyB satellite broadcasting to the Competition Commission, while Labour has tabled a parliamentary motion calling on News Corporation to withdraw its bid.

The material previously suppressed either directly by News International personnel or as a result of the refusal of the police to conduct a proper inquiry is now implicating top-level figures in either the original crimes or their cover up.

The Metropolitan Police investigated many of these allegations in 2006, but prosecuted only Mulcaire and *News of the World* royal reporter Clive Goodman, accepting the unlikely claim that they were rogue individuals. They did so despite having Mulcaire's records of thousands of hacking operations sanctioned by a number of other *News of the World* personnel.

None of the 4,000 named victims were even informed that they had been targeted. Andy Hayman, who led the 2005-2006

Metropolitan Police inquiry, now writes for Murdoch's *Times*.

Last month, *News of the World* handed over documents to the police regarding the bribing of officers that were in its possession since 2007. None of the eight officers named have even been charged. They have merely been investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

News of the World's dossier was based on 300 e-mails indicating that hacking was widespread and the bribes of police officers totalled £120,000. At least nine journalists could face prison sentences. An additional 2,200 e-mails are "missing."

Dow Jones & Co. chief executive Les Hinton headed News International when the phone hacking was first uncovered. In 2007, with *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson having resigned, Hinton told MPs on the culture, media and sport select committee that he believed Goodman "was the only person" who knew about hacking. He further asserted his belief "absolutely that Andy [Coulson] did not have knowledge of what was going on."

Hinton was among five News International executives who had access to the internal inquiry now given to the police, according to the *Guardian*. Coulson went on to become the top media spokesman for the current prime minister, David Cameron.

Coulson was forced to stand down in January over the hacking scandal. He was arrested last Friday in connection with "allegations of phone hacking and corruption."

Colin Myler, who replaced Coulson as editor of *News of the World*, told a House of Commons select committee in July 2009 regarding more widespread hacking: "Over 2,500 emails were accessed because we were exploring whether or not there was any other evidence to suggest essentially what you are hinting at. No evidence was found."

But the e-mails in fact indicate that Coulson was aware of payments being made to police officers. In addition, Sean Hoare, who worked at the *Sun* and *News of the World*, told the BBC that Coulson was "well aware that the practice [of hacking] exists." He told the *New York Times* that he played tape recordings of hacked messages for Coulson and that he "actively encouraged me" to hack voice mail accounts.

More important still, James Murdoch, the son of Rupert Murdoch, has now admitted he approved out-of-court settlements with hacking victims that covered up criminal activity. Murdoch, as European chief executive of News Corporation, personally agreed to a £700,000 out-of-court settlement in April 2008 with Gordon Taylor, head of the Professional Footballers' Association. The settlement included a gag clause. Murdoch did not inform the police of the settlement.

Rebekah Brooks, Rupert Murdoch and James Murdoch have now been "requested" to appear next week before a committee of MPs examining phone hacking and police corruption.

It was John Yates, assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, who took the decision not to reopen the case against

News of the World in 2009, despite being in possession of Mulcaire's notes. He said at the time there were only 10 to 12 victims of hacking by *News of the World*.

Yates says he came to his decision not to reopen the investigation after only eight hours' consideration, motivated in part by his prioritising of the security operation for next year's Olympic games. He told the *Sunday Telegraph* that he "didn't do a review" of the 11,000 pages of evidence available to him.

"I'm not going to go down and look at bin bags.... I am supposed to be an assistant commissioner," he said. "To have given the go-ahead for a full review of a case of that nature would have involved four or five people and five or six months work and a lot of resources, and in July 2009, why would I do that?"

He added that News International would not let him investigate their premises. "When we made the arrests in 2006," he stated, "on the day we went to Wapping there was a Mexican stand-off, a lockdown, and they wouldn't let us in."

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Stephenson is in the spotlight for his previous defence of Yates's conduct and his own in not pursuing *News of the World*.

Lord Macdonald, the former director of public prosecutions (DPP), who advised the Metropolitan Police during its 2006 investigation, retired as DPP in October 2008 and has for some time been a regular contributor to the *Times*.

It was confirmed in a statement by News International that Macdonald has been employed since May as their legal advisor on the hacking scandal and its contacts with police.

In March, the *Guardian* revealed that Crown Prosecution Service paperwork produced at the time admitted to a potential "vast number" of victims. This was at a time when Scotland Yard was publicly insisting it had found "only a handful" of cases involving just two potential prosecutions.

The DPP and the police "ring-fenced" evidence they presented in court in order to suppress the names of prominent victims and conceal "a vast array of offending behaviour," focusing instead on "a discrete area of offences relating to [palace employees Jamie Lee-Pinkerton and Helen Asprey] and the suspects Goodman and Mulcaire."



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