

UK Parliamentary Select Committee continues cover-up of Murdoch scandal

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The appearance of Rupert Murdoch, the chairman and CEO of News Corporation, and his son James Murdoch, its deputy chief operating officer, before the British Parliament's Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee was a piece of well-choreographed political theatre.

As with Rebekah Brooks, the former chief executive of News International, News Corp's UK arm, who was questioned afterwards, the Murdochs knew beforehand that there was no danger of them being asked probing questions, let alone suffering any legal consequences from their testimony.

Far from the much vaunted reassertion of the authority of Parliament and the bringing of Murdoch to account, the event took on the character of a PR exercise for News Corp.

One would never have known by the committee's deference that the three News Corp luminaries were appearing to answer questions relating not only to the *News of the World*'s phone hacking, but to bribery, corruption and blackmail of police officers, public officials and leading politicians by Murdoch's media empire.

With each day, new facts and allegations expose what former Prime Minister Gordon Brown accurately described as a vast criminal nexus. The contrast between such rampant criminality and the kid gloves treatment of the Murdochs was stark.

The tone had been set that morning by Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, who stated that the questioning of the News Corp executives "has to be done in a calm and level-headed way and I'm sure it will be on all sides of the house, from MPs from all parties, because the key thing here is to get to the truth. It is not about a witch-hunt."

His words echoed those of the select committee's chair, Conservative MP John Whittingdale. Prior to yesterday's event, Whittingdale was revealed to be a friend of Brooks, former News International Chairman Les Hinton, and Rupert Murdoch's daughter, Elisabeth Murdoch.

The unserious nature of the proceedings was such that the two most senior people involved in the most all-encompassing scandal in British history, with major

international ramifications, were scheduled to appear and be questioned for all of one hour. As it turned out, the questioning took three hours, but everything else proceeded according to plan.

Murdoch's first gesture was to interrupt his son to declare with obvious insincerity that today was "the most humble day of his life." As the proceedings wore on he became less restrained in his arrogance.

News Corp "tolerates no wrongdoing," he contemptuously told the panel. He bore no personal responsibility and had no knowledge of what had happened at a newspaper that made up just one per cent of his company, he added.

He had been betrayed by "people I trusted... They betrayed the company, and me, and they deserve to pay, and I think that, frankly, I'm the best person to clean this up."

The default response of the Murdochs and Brooks to the extremely timid questioning was a blanket profession of ignorance of any wrongdoing by their employees, coupled with the occasional insistence that they could not answer questions relating to an ongoing criminal investigation.

Their testimony did reveal that News International had contributed to the hefty defence costs racked up by private detective Glen Mulcaire, jailed in 2007 for hacking members of the royal family. Mulcaire is thought to be responsible as well for intercepting the mobile phone of the young murder victim, Milly Dowler.

The hearing also aired allegations that News International had subsidised the pay of Andy Coulson after he resigned as *News of the World* editor following the jailing of Mulcaire and the newspaper's royals correspondent, Clive Goodman. Coulson went on to work for Prime Minister David Cameron in opposition and in government.

The select committee hearing ended more successfully than the Murdochs could have wished had they written the script themselves. A puerile stunt by a professional comedian, who pushed a shaving foam pie into Rupert Murdoch's face, ended with Murdoch's wife Wendy punching the attacker.

"Mr. Murdoch, your wife has a very good left hook," said

Tom Watson, the Labour MP who has played a central role in exposing the hacking scandal, while Conservative MP Louise Mensch thanked Murdoch profusely for agreeing to continue.

Murdoch answered a few more feeble questions before the session closed with his reading of a self-serving statement.

The most prosaic verdict on the proceedings was provided by the financial markets. At one point, News Corp shares rose by \$1.07, or 7.1 percent, to \$16.03. They closed up 6 percent, or \$2 billion. News Corp shares had previously fallen by 17 percent since the scandal broke.

Earlier in the day, the Home Affairs Select Committee questioned the former commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Stephenson, and the ex-assistant commissioner, John Yates. Until their resignations this week, these were the most senior police officers in the UK. Both are heavily implicated in the *News of the World* scandal. Yet, along with Metropolitan Police spokesman Dick Fedorcio, they were questioned separately and in the most cursory fashion, the entire hearing lasting barely an hour.

The testimony of Stephenson did shed light on the intimate relations between the Metropolitan Police and the political establishment. He said he did not want to risk “compromising” Prime Minister Cameron by disclosing to him information related to the phone hacking scandal.

This was in connection with the fact that Neil Wallis, who was the deputy editor of *News of the World* under Coulson, when phone hacking took place on a massive scale, was employed as an adviser to the Metropolitan Police. In this capacity he had advised Stephenson and Yates during a period when the Metropolitan Police rejected calls for the reopening of a criminal investigation into the interception of voicemails and the bribing of police by *News of the World*.

Stephenson said in his testimony, “Actually, a senior official at No. 10 guided us that actually we should not compromise the prime minister, and it seems to me to be entirely sensible.”

Under questioning about the case of Dave Cook, a police officer who says he was a victim of *News of the World* phone hacking while re-investigating a murder case, Yates said he had a meeting at Scotland Yard with Rebekah Brooks on the issue.

This evidence points to the fundamental reason why the two select committees are nothing more than a cover for the refusal to conduct a serious investigation of the News International scandal that would bring the guilty to book. Murdoch, his son, and Brooks were being quizzed by the representatives of parties that are deeply and irretrievably embroiled in the corrupt and criminal practices of News International. That is why they were treated as honoured

guests, rather than those implicated in high crimes.

It is why they were not joined by Coulson, despite his editorship covering a longer period than Brooks herself and the years when most of the criminal activity so far exposed in fact occurred.

It is why there has been no suggestion that either former prime minister Tony Blair or Cameron himself give evidence—even though the network of criminal activity revealed again and again finishes behind the doors of Number 10 Downing Street.

Murdoch joked about his numerous visits to Downing Street, via the back door, to discuss over the years with Conservative and Labour prime ministers alike, saying, “I wish they’d leave me alone.”

The select committee hearings held yesterday, and any other inquiries that may be organised by Parliament, are a fraud, designed to cover up not only the crimes of the Murdoch empire, but the collusion and complicity of the entire political establishment and all of the official institutions of the state.

Today, Parliament is to meet in an emergency session that has been forced upon a reluctant Cameron so that he can take questions on yesterday’s proceedings. MPs will then break for the summer recess and will not return until September 5.

If there was the slightest commitment to revealing the truth of what has happened, all leave would be cancelled and the Murdochs and others would be questioned under oath for criminal prosecutions. This is, after all, a scandal that has implicated not merely News International, but the major political parties, the police, the civil service and the judiciary.

A central and overriding lesson must be drawn. Parliament and its parties are nothing more than the hirelings of an obscenely wealthy oligarchy that has complete liberty to pursue their self-enrichment and impose their counterrevolutionary social agenda by whatever means they see fit. Only the independent political intervention of the working class, under the leadership of its own socialist party, can put an end to this reactionary and anti-democratic set-up.



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