

New moves by British parliament to shield the Murdochs

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On Friday, members of Parliament's Commons Culture Select Committee voted against recalling News Corporation Chairman James Murdoch to give more evidence on phone hacking and police corruption. Labour MP Tom Watson had called on Murdoch, the son of international media mogul Rupert Murdoch, and two ex-*News of the World* executives, former editor Colin Myler and the newspaper's ex-legal manager Tom Crone, to appear.

Myler and Crone had challenged the evidence that James Murdoch gave to the select committee last week. Murdoch was called to answer questions, alongside Rupert Murdoch, in his capacity as the chairman of News International (NI), the owner of the now defunct *News of the World*. News International is the British arm of Murdoch's News Corporation media empire.

Myler and Crone said that Murdoch was not telling the truth on how much he knew about the extent of telephone hacking at the *News of the World*.

In response to the allegation that Murdoch had misled Parliament, a criminal offence, John Whittingdale, the chairman of the culture committee, has merely written to Myler and Crone asking for clarification. "We've agreed to ask them to give us those extra details," he said, before adding, "When we have received this response we may well call them in."

More evidence of criminal activity is coming to light daily. On Thursday, the *Guardian* reported that *News of the World* may have illegally accessed the phone belonging to Sara Payne, the mother of eight-year-old murder victim Sarah Payne. The paper stated that police had informed Sara Payne that her details were in notes compiled by private detective Glenn Mulcaire while he was working for *News of the World*. The police have maintained as recently as this month that no details about Sara Payne had been found in Mulcaire's notebooks, computer records or audio tapes, in their possession from August 2006.

Sara Payne is not just another addition to the list of names whose phones and personal details have been illegally accessed. Following the abduction and murder of her daughter Sarah in July 2000, *News of the World* launched a campaign for a new "Sarah's

Law," advocating the naming of paedophiles. The legislation was eventually passed by the then-Labour government.

The newspaper gave Sara Payne a mobile phone to be used, in the words of former *News of the World* editor Rebekah Brooks, "for the benefit of the campaign for Sarah's law." It is now alleged that this phone was then hacked.

The "farewell" edition of the newspaper included an article by Sara Payne, in which she wrote, "The *News of the World* proved it is a *force for good*." Payne also stated in the same piece, "there were rumours—which turned out to be untrue—that I and my fellow Phoenix charity chiefs had our phones hacked."

On Friday, Mulcaire, through his lawyers, officially denied suggestions he acted without orders from the newspaper. He said he was "effectively employed" by *News of the World* from 2002 as a private investigator and had not acted "unilaterally" in intercepting voicemails.

"As an employee he acted on the instructions of others," a statement said.

Despite the welter of information emerging that strongly points to criminality on a massive scale at News International, the main figures at News Corp appear confident they can ride out the storm. On Friday, the board of BSkyB, the UK telecommunications company the Murdochs are attempting to buy outright, confirmed that James Murdoch is to remain as company chairman.

The Murdochs rely on the fact that the British political elite and the police are seeking at all costs to prevent a serious investigation of the hacking of thousands of phones and the bribing of police officers, and block the bringing of criminal charges against the guilty.

Before embarking on a two-week holiday in a luxurious Tuscan villa, Prime Minister David Cameron made great play of launching a public inquiry before the parliamentary recess.

But this is a manoeuvre by someone closely implicated in the crisis through his four-year employment of former *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson as his director of communications.

The terms and remit of the inquiry had, moreover, been agreed by the leader of the Labour Party opposition, Ed Miliband.

Last week, it was reported that Lord Justice Leveson, who will head the inquiry, had attended functions with Rupert Murdoch's son-in-law.

On Thursday, Leveson said the inquiries will hold preliminary hearings in September and claimed he will report back within a year with findings. This will be 14 months after the *Guardian* went public with the revelations that the phone of murdered schoolgirl Millie Dowler had been hacked in 2002 by *News of the World*, prompting the present crisis.

Leveson's inquiry won't report back until more than six years after a previous investigation, by the Metropolitan Police, found "no evidence" of wrongdoing at News International.

Such is the scope of the inquiry, which includes an examination of press ethics and practices in relation to the public, politicians and police, that a timetable of one year is very unlikely. Leveson hinted strongly that a 12-month report-back was not possible, saying he would strive to report back in that time frame but "not at all cost."

"The focus of the inquiry is the culture, practices and ethics of the press in the context of the latter's relationship with the public, the police and politicians," Leveson said.

In October, the inquiry will hold "seminars" on various topics such as the law, media regulation, the ethics of journalism and the practice and pressures of investigative reporting. Further seminars will then be held on the relationship of the press to police and politicians, on media plurality and cross-media ownership.

No investigation of the actual hacking at *News of the World* will be made until the Metropolitan Police have concluded their investigation—based largely on documents in their possession for more than five years and supposedly never examined!

Nobody is being held to account for anything.

It was announced Friday that Cameron will be asked questions on September 6, not by the Leveson inquiry but by the liaison committee—made up of the chairs of all the other Commons select committees. In a session of just 90 minutes duration, he will be asked about "government, politics and the media." Half of this short session will be devoted to questions on developments in Europe and their impact on the UK.

What is taking place is nothing more than the buying of time, whilst the central issues of the *News of the World* crisis are swept under the carpet. That is why the inquiry's remit is so ludicrously wide, and set to include an examination of the Internet and social media to boot.

The *News of the World* scandal exposes the intimate involvement

of every institution of the capitalist state with the financial oligarchy represented by Murdoch. All the major parties, the government, Parliament, the courts, the police are implicated in criminal activity on an "industrial scale."

Successive governments have been transformed into something akin to wholly-owned subsidiaries of News Corp.

In just the 15 months since Cameron assumed office, cabinet ministers have officially held private meetings with Murdoch executives on more than 60 occasions. Taking account of social events, including receptions at party conferences, at least 107 meetings have been held—an average of over seven meetings a month.

Nothing could happen in top government circles that News Corp was not acutely aware of, including discussions relating to war strategy and national security. On two occasions, James Murdoch and former News International chief executive Rebekah Brooks were given confidential defence briefings on Afghanistan and Britain's strategic defence review by the Defence Secretary, Liam Fox. A further briefing was held with Brooks, Rupert Murdoch and the *Sunday Times* editor, John Witherow.

Other meetings included a dinner between Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Rupert Murdoch within days of the government taking office. Hunt was later put in charge of overseeing News Corp's £8 billion attempted takeover of BSkyB. Another two meetings were held with James Murdoch regarding the takeover. Just before the Millie Dowler revelations broke, scuppering the deal for now, Hunt had given his approval to the takeover.

The Labour Party's relations with the Murdoch press were just as intimate. When Cameron faced questions in Parliament regarding his government's close ties with News Corp and Rupert Murdoch, he replied by referring to Labour's own relations with the billionaire. This included, as Cameron pointed out, former Prime Minister Tony Blair's trip to Australia prior to the 1997 election in order to solicit Murdoch's favour. Cameron said that he had released the details of the government's own meetings with News Corp/News International and called on Miliband to do the same, which he has still not done.



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