

Murdoch and the rule of the oligarchy

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The ongoing exposure of systematic hacking of thousands of phones and computers by employees of Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* lifts the lid on the rampant criminality of the corporate and political elite, in Britain and internationally. At least 7,000 people have had their phones hacked and their privacy invaded. The trawl for personal information has targeted a wide range of victims, from politicians and members of the royal family to the families of murder victims and soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

The scandal is revealing the thorough-going decay of democracy and all of the official institutions in Britain, including the major parties, Parliament, the judiciary and the media. The most powerful media corporation in Britain, which constantly trumpets the need for "law and order," has presided over serious violations of the law, including hacking on what one MP called "an industrial scale." It has done so year-on-year with virtual impunity.

Murdoch executives and reporters are notorious as well for threatening and bullying politicians and other notables who criticize the operations of News International or otherwise arouse the ire of the Murdoch family.

Now reports have emerged that a *News of the World* executive destroyed millions of potentially incriminating emails in order to thwart further investigations.

Both of the major parties, Conservative and Labour, are implicated in these crimes, not only because of their refusal to call to account News International, the parent firm of Murdoch's British media outlets, but because of their intimate relations with Murdoch's media empire. They never challenged the Metropolitan Police for accepting the patently absurd claim that these illegal practices were the actions of one rogue reporter and a private investigator, even as it surfaced that police officers had received tens of thousands of pounds in bribes from *News of the World*.

It was only after numerous civil cases had been taken out against the newspaper by celebrities whose phones were hacked that, in January, the Crown Prosecution Service announced it would review material held by police on phone hacking at *News of the World* to "assess if a fresh criminal trial is likely."

Prime Minister David Cameron on Friday was forced to

acknowledge official collusion with the Murdoch press, stating, "The truth is, we have all been in this together—the press, politicians and leaders of all parties—and yes, that includes me."

He added, "During the last government, a police investigation was undertaken, it was inadequate and not enough was done. There were reports from the information commissioner and they went unheeded. There were select committee reports on phone hacking and there was no follow-up. Throughout all this, all the warnings, all the concern, the government at the time did nothing. And frankly, neither did the opposition."

This *mea culpa* is Cameron's attempt to limit the damage to his government from the scandal. It came the same morning as the arrest of former *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson, Cameron's head of communications until Coulson's forced resignation in January. However, neither Cameron's admission of responsibility nor his guarded swipe against former Labour governments do justice to the extent of the incestuous, decades-long relations between the Murdoch empire and Britain's political elite.

Murdoch is forever associated with the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and above all with Thatcher's brutal assault on the working class. He cheered on her deregulation of the City of London, privatisations and tax cuts for corporations and the rich from which he benefited more than most. *News of the World*'s parent company, News International, carried out an infamous union-busting operation, sacking 6,000 print workers and transferring production to Wapping in London's East End in 1986.

Then, after Murdoch decided that the Tories had exhausted their usefulness as a vehicle for attacking the working class and enriching the ruling elite, he switched support to Labour—which was more than ready to do his bidding. Murdoch dictated government policy to such a degree that Lance Price, a media advisor to former Prime Minister Tony Blair, called Murdoch "the 24th member of the Cabinet." Price added, "His presence was always felt."

Murdoch himself has publicly boasted of setting the agenda of the Labour government on Europe and "the

breakdown of law and order in Britain.” The Murdoch press has relentlessly promoted wars of aggression, most notably the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. Blair telephoned Murdoch personally on three occasions in the days leading up to the US-British invasion.

Current Labour leader Ed Miliband is now posing as a critic of *News of the World*, seeking to make political capital out of Cameron’s relations with Coulson and Murdoch press executive Rebekah Brooks. This is a transparent fraud.

The *News of the World* hacking scandal first came to light in 2006 and was swept under the carpet by the Metropolitan Police, without challenge by the Labour governments of Blair and his successor, Gordon Brown. On April 9, an anonymous ex-minister told the *Guardian* that Murdoch had “relayed messages to Brown last year via a third party, urging him to help take the political heat out of the row, which he felt was in danger of damaging his company.”

It was only last month that Miliband himself attended News International’s summer party in London, alongside shadow chancellor Ed Balls, two of his closest advisers, Tom Baldwin and Stewart Wood, shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper and shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander. The *Guardian* noted at the time that Labour luminaries outnumbered a Conservative delegation headed by Cameron and his wife, Samantha.

These relations underscore the travesty of the electoral process in Britain. State policy is determined not by the population’s choice to elect a Conservative or Labour government, but by a clique of billionaires that sets the agenda of all the major parties—of which Murdoch is a particularly influential member, thanks to his control of the media.

How does one account for the ability of employees of News International to engage in such rampant criminality without let or hindrance?

The official structures of politics and the media in Britain and internationally have become entirely divorced from and openly hostile to the interests of the general population. They have become the province of a plutocratic layer that acts without legal restraint.

Murdoch himself is widely acknowledged to be the most powerful man in Britain and one of the most powerful people in the world. He is the archetypal representative of a global financial oligarchy that has arisen on the basis of financial parasitism and an unprecedented growth of social inequality.

The narrow layer of the super-rich to which Murdoch belongs has dictated every aspect of political, economic and social life over more than three decades. His 175 or so newspapers and television channels, including Sky in Britain and Fox in the US, are widely viewed as kingmakers inside

the political establishment.

Murdoch is the supreme purveyor of a particular type of gutter journalism, whose emphasis on sex scandals and the antics of the rich and famous is meant to divert and confuse the public and encourage the most backward sentiments.

In America, Fox News and the *New York Post* serve the same function as the *Sun*, *News of the World* (which Murdoch shut down on Sunday) and Sky TV in the UK, while the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page articulates the political agenda of the most reactionary sections of the US ruling elite. The Murdoch media befoul social and intellectual life with an unremitting torrent of right-wing social nostrums, warmongering, national chauvinism, glorification of “free enterprise,” and demands that essential services on which millions rely be slashed.

The most significant expression of the political and ideological putrefaction this has produced is found within the former social democratic parties, such as the British Labour Party. They all easily adapted themselves to Murdoch’s brand of politics, emerging as unabashed defenders of the savage austerity measures demanded after the 2008 financial crash.

The scale of the criminal activity that has been exposed at *News of the World* demands a full and public accounting. All of the major figures associated with News International, including Coulson, Brooks and Murdoch himself, must be questioned under oath as part of a full-scale criminal investigation. In any such inquiry, they should be joined by Blair, Brown, Cameron and their associates.

It is clear, however, that the British ruling class will not carry out such an investigation. Any inquiry under the control of the existing political establishment will be a cover-up, aiming to protect News International and its allies in the political establishment and state apparatus.

Justice will be secured, and the predatory and socially destructive activities of the media barons halted, only in connection with the development of a mass political movement of the working class that sets out to remove from power an elite which has demonstrated that it is entirely unfit to rule.

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