The Murdoch hacking scandal and class “justice”

Julie Hyland
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Two weeks into the latest stage of the scandal over phone hacking and other illegal activities by Rupert Murdoch’s News International group in Britain, revelations continue to pour out, each more damaging than the last.

It has been revealed that *News of the World*, which endlessly banged the drum of “law and order,” over the course of many years tapped into the mobile phones of thousands of people, including politicians, government ministers, police, members of the royal family, film celebrities and journalists.

It and other Murdoch newspapers stand accused of illegally obtaining the personal records of prominent government officials. Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown has accused Murdoch’s *Sunday Times* of using “known criminals” to access his financial and legal files, with the aim of “bringing me down as a government minister.”

These accusations have been accompanied by numerous reports of the Murdoch press’s modus operandi of bribery, blackmail and intimidation.

Yet, despite the professed moral outrage of the government and opposition parties, nothing has been done to prepare a criminal investigation into the allegations. The premises of News International should long ago have been declared a crime scene. Instead, the government, by refusing to take even the most basic steps to secure evidence of wrong-doing, is facilitating a cover-up.

It has been reported that thousands, and perhaps millions, of emails relating to the scandal have already been erased by a News International executive. But nothing has been done to stop the destruction of potentially incriminating evidence. No computers have been impounded, no hard-drives seized, no minutes of board meetings subpoenaed.

The promise of a parliamentary inquiry to report months, if not years, from now is being used for the primary purpose of enabling Murdoch’s media group to destroy evidence of illegal activity and buy time to organise a whitewash.

The police have not even called in for questioning the figures at the centre of the allegations, such as the former *News of the World* editor Rebekah Brooks, currently the chief executive of News International, Rupert Murdoch’s son James, chairman of News International, or the big boss himself.

Just three individuals have been questioned by the police, including Andy Coulson, editor at the *News of the World* between 2003 and 2007 and Prime Minister David Cameron’s director of communications until January. None have been charged.

The entire response of both the governing parties—the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats—and the opposition Labour Party to the exposure of the criminal operations of Murdoch has been focused on protecting the international press mogul known to many as the “Dirty Digger”. Every institution of the capitalist state—the major parties, the government, Parliament, the courts, the police—is implicated in Murdoch’s crimes. They are all to one degree or another on the billionaire press baron’s payroll, and have all been involved in covering up for his mafia-like methods.

It was Andy Hayman, former head of counterterrorism at the Metropolitan Police, who oversaw the first investigation into phone hacking in 2006, and shut it down after the prosecution of just two individuals. He now writes a column for Murdoch’s *Times*.

This is the same individual who led the demand for police powers to detain people for 90 days without trial on “anti-terror” grounds. It was on Hayman’s watch that the innocent young Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes was executed by police in July 2005, and another innocent man was shot during an “anti-terror” raid in June 2006.

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It was John Yates, assistant commissioner at the Metropolitan police, who decided not to reopen the investigation into phone hacking in 2009 despite being in possession of evidence that a "vast number" of people were victims. Yates, it now transpires, was wining and dining with the very people he was meant to be investigating—enjoying five lunches with News International representatives between August 2008 and November 2009.

The former director of public prosecution, Ken Macdonald, reviewed the phone hacking evidence at the same time as Yates and concluded that there was no need for an investigation. Not only is Macdonald, now Lord Macdonald, a contributor to the *Times*, he was retained by *News of the World* to advise it on the allegations against its journalists.

Cameron stated last Friday, "The truth is, we have all been in this together—the press, politicians and leaders of all parties—and yes, that includes me."

A devastating self-indictment that under any genuinely democratic system would result in the immediate resignation of the government. No prominent voice in the political establishment or the media has even suggested as much. Although Labour leader Ed Miliband has sought to make political capital out of the scandal, his party is just as compromised as Cameron's—hence his offer of cross-party backing to the government.

What is being exposed is not simply the moral and political depravity of one man or one corporation, but the putrefaction of an entire social and political system. Nothing the Labourites or Tories say can conceal the fact that for more than 30 years Murdoch has been the power behind the throne of British politics—and indeed, the politics of countries all over the world. This includes the US, where Murdoch's Fox network, *New York Post* and *Wall Street Journal* largely set the reactionary agenda for the two big business parties.

In Britain, the Labour and Conservative parties have battled one another for Murdoch's patronage and competed to most diligently carry out the viciously anti-working class, anti-democratic and militarist policies that are his stock in trade—and that of the entire class of global financial parasites which Murdoch personifies.

The hands-off treatment of Murdoch illustrates the class basis of capitalist "justice", in which the rich and powerful are protected by the state and enjoy virtual immunity from the law. Behind the increasingly empty rituals of bourgeois "democracy", including elections that have no impact on the policies pursued by the government, the modern-day financial aristocrats exercise a de facto dictatorship.

The double standard is ever more brazen. Young people in Britain who protest against the destruction of education and any hope for a decent future are branded as thugs, beaten by the police and hauled off to jail.

Even as Prime Minister Cameron, Labour leader Miliband and Liberal Democrat chief Clegg were summoning up the courage to plead with Murdoch to withdraw his bid to take full control of British Sky Broadcasting, Julian Assange was forced to argue in a London court against his extradition to Sweden to face trumped-up sex charges and his likely handover to American authorities. His "crime" was doing the principled work of a genuine journalist—uncovering war crimes by the United States and its allies—rather than purveying the lies and filth that are the trademark of the Murdoch press.

The relationship between the two main parties and Murdoch is based on a common economic and political agenda—one forged in the early 1980s, as the ruling class set out to destroy the social rights won by working people in order to give free rein to the corporations and the City of London.

Murdoch backed Thatcher to launch the anti-working class offensive, then switched to Tony Blair and Labour to deepen it, and switched back to the Tories and Cameron to finish the job of destroying the social gains of a century of working class struggle.

The primary concern of the political establishment remains the protection of the Murdoch empire and the prevention of any genuine public accounting of its crimes or the role of those who aided and abetted it.

This type of government collusion in corporate crime is a universal phenomenon. Only last year in the United States, BP was guilty of criminal negligence on a colossal scale for the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that killed 11 workers and caused untold environmental and economic damage. The response of the Obama administration was not to get to the truth and hold accountable those responsible, but to shield BP and its major investors. A year later, no one has been prosecuted.

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