

Letters show Scottish National Party leader's wooing of Rupert Murdoch

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Scotland's First Minister and Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Alex Salmond was forced last week to publish details of his contact with Rupert Murdoch and executives from News International, the UK division of News Corporation.

The disclosure is the result of the scandal surrounding Murdoch's now closed *News of the World*, which involved the hacking of thousands of mobile phones and bribery of police officers with the aim of blackmailing and intimidating leading public figures.

The scandal laid bare the nefarious relations between Britain's politicians, police and judiciary and the corporate oligarch—all of whom have colluded to prevent any genuine investigation into the activities of Murdoch's corporation, much less hold anyone to account.

The 17 pages of correspondence and details of meetings cover Salmond's contact with News International executives dating back to June 2007. Just one month before, the SNP had become the largest party in the devolved Scottish parliament. It had been able to make electoral gains due to hostility to the previous Labour Party-Liberal Democrat administration and the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which the SNP claimed to oppose.

In the days leading up to the Scottish parliamentary elections, the front page of Murdoch's *Scottish Sun* newspaper featured a noose, warning of Scotland's fate should the SNP win. Murdoch was then still backing Tony Blair, due to his support for the Iraq war and the Labour Party's right-wing big business agenda of which it was an integral part.

The correspondence makes clear that, almost immediately, Salmond set out assiduously to woo Murdoch and News International, offering gifts and business inducements.

In early October that year, Salmond flew out for a meeting with Murdoch in New York. Afterwards, a letter from the SNP leader dated October 24 gushingly informed the arch-reactionary that he “as ever, found your views both insightful and stimulating”.

Thanking Murdoch for his gift of a book by US Senator

Jim Webb, “Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America”, Salmond said he was “delighted” Murdoch had agreed to join the GlobalScot network, which he described as “an elite sales force for Scotland”.

It was “a huge complement to our nation that leaders such as yourself have agreed to contribute” to GlobalScot, he wrote.

The following month, Salmond wrote thanking News International for the invitation to open its new printing plant at Eurocentral business park, Lanarkshire. Offering Murdoch tickets for the award-winning play *Black Watch*, which “captures something of the essence of the fighting Scot that Jim Webb has been writing about,” Salmond wrote, “I hope that News International goes from strength to strength and that your ‘big bet’ in newspapers will pay off”. The letter was signed “yours for Scotland”.

Salmond's opening of the Eurocentral plant, which prints Murdoch's titles, is particularly significant. The relationship between Murdoch, the police and the ruling elite was cemented by News International's brutal assault on striking print workers during the 1986-87 dispute at Wapping, London. It was regarded as critical to the offensive against working class opposition to the destruction of jobs and living standards by the Thatcher government, as well as facilitating a media that would function openly as the promoter and cheerleader of this assault.

In 2004, News International announced it was building the Lanarkshire complex. The resulting move out of Wapping saw some two-thirds of the 1,000 or so workforce lose their jobs. Approximately 150 are employed at the Lanarkshire plant. Salmond would later boast to Murdoch's son James that Scotland was the “gold standard” in business outsourcing due to its “combination of high quality skills and lower overheads, compared to the rest of the UK and Europe.”

So desperate was he to woo Murdoch, that Salmond mistakenly addressed one letter to “Sir Rupert” in September 2008. This was one of a number inviting the News Corp. head to join the SNP leader as part of the

official Scottish delegation to the 37th Ryder Cup golf matches to be held in Kentucky.

More letters followed, with Salmond inviting Murdoch to be his “special” guest of honour for the Year of Homecoming celebrations in July 2009.

“Homecoming celebrates the 250th Anniversary of our national poet, Robert Burns, and we are associating this with a call to all those with an association or affinity with Scotland to ‘come home’ during 2009... I would be delighted if you could join me at any of the Homecoming events as my special guest.”

In a letter dated February 2009, Salmond offered a “great programming opportunity” for the Murdoch-owned Sky TV for exclusive coverage of the event in Edinburgh, which was partly funded by taxpayers.

Murdoch did not “come home”. But Salmond’s contacts with the oligarch were part of 25 meetings with News International executives, including Les Hinton and former *Sun* and *News of the World* editor Rebekah Brooks, both of whom resigned over the phone hacking scandal.

In January this year, Salmond met with James Murdoch in London. Their lunch was “most enjoyable”, Salmond wrote, adding he “thought our conversation on business opportunities for BSkyB in Scotland most useful.”

Up until the phone hacking scandal, it was considered a certainty that Murdoch would be successful in his bid to take full ownership of the BSkyB satellite channel. He has now been forced to withdraw. Before that, however, Salmond met up again with News International executives at their headquarters in London in June, at his request.

Salmond had already received his pay-off. The *Scottish Sun* switched to supporting the SNP in the Scottish parliamentary elections in May. Just two weeks before, Salmond had been the only party leader at a News International “political breakfast”.

After the election, in which the SNP won an outright majority, News International’s general manager in Scotland and former *Scottish Sun* editor David Dinsmore congratulated Salmond on his victory. Dinsmore wrote, “I look forward to News International playing its part in helping to make the country a place where outward looking, forward thinking and risk taking are the norm.”

Salmond’s correspondence does more than illustrate the sycophancy of the entire political establishment—whatever their nominal political colourations—towards Murdoch as the figurehead of the global financial aristocracy they have all courted.

In 2006, former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan, a member of the Scottish parliament, won a record £200,000 in damages after suing the *News of the World* over salacious allegations about his sex life, including that he

visited Cupid’s swingers’ club in Manchester and had a number of affairs.

Following the verdict, News International swore revenge. In January this year, Sheridan was jailed for three years for perjury.

It was Sheridan’s former comrades in the Scottish Socialist Party who colluded with Murdoch and the *News of the World* to ensure his conviction—acting as witnesses for the tabloid at the perjury trial.

The extent of Salmond’s contacts with News International raises the question as to the Scottish government’s own involvement in Sheridan’s prosecution.

It was the Scottish state that took the unprecedented decision to conduct a three-year investigation into the *News of the World*’s claims that Sheridan had lied in his libel case against the newspaper. That investigation and subsequent trial—estimated to cost taxpayers up to £3 million—lacked any conceivable public interest justification.

Ian Hamilton QC, one of Scotland’s leading jurists, described the case as a “prostitution of Scots law. The Lord Advocate is a member of the Scottish government and the government was the pimp. The aim was not to seek justice but to placate Rupert Murdoch and the *News of the World*.”

Above all, Salmond’s courtship of Murdoch confirms the reactionary character of Scottish nationalism that is championed by the ex-left groups, including Sheridan himself.

Writing on the SNP victory in May, the Socialist Equality Party explained that the social impulse for Scottish nationalism was “not, as its apologists claim, some leftist sentiment in the working class, but the egoistic strivings of a privileged petty-bourgeois stratum for whom the development of globalised production has provided a means of making its own relations with the transnational corporations and global investors.”

As a former oil economist for the Royal Bank of Scotland, Salmond “embodies this grasping stratum and its intimate relations with powerful sections of big business”, the statement added.

This is the basis for the relations established between Salmond and Murdoch. It is these common class interests that the ex-radicals have consciously sought to conceal in their rush to join the swamp of petty-bourgeois nationalism.



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