

James Murdoch knew of widespread phone hacking, UK Parliament told

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At this week's hearing of the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, the now-defunct *News of the World* legal manager Tom Crone told members of parliament that News International/News Corp. executive James Murdoch had not told the truth about an e-mail indicating phone hacking at the paper involved more than one reporter.

Crone's statement was backed up by Colin Myler, former editor of the *News of the World*, who also told the committee that the e-mail was discussed with Murdoch.

In July, Rupert Murdoch and his son James appeared before the committee. Both said they were not told of such an e-mail. Just hours after Crone and Myler spoke, James Murdoch said that he stood by his original July answers.

Crone told MPs that he saw what is known as the "For Neville" e-mail and said he was "certain" he told James Murdoch about it at a meeting in 2008.

The significance of the e-mail is that it proves that knowledge of phone hacking by private investigator Glenn Mulcaire went beyond a single reporter, Clive Goodman. Goodman was the supposed "rogue" *News of the World* reporter who was jailed in January 2007 for commissioning the interception of royal family voice mails.

It is believed the "For Neville" e-mail was for the attention of Neville Thurlbeck, the paper's chief reporter at the time who had worked for News International for 21 years. The e-mail was a transcript of an intercepted voice mail written out by Ross Hindley, a junior reporter at the paper, and later sent back to the Glenn Mulcaire, who had hacked it. The e-mail proves that senior *News of the World* staff were aware that the phone of Professional Footballers' Association boss Gordon Taylor had been hacked.

Crone said he informed James Murdoch about the e-mail during a meeting also attended by Myler. According to Crone, Murdoch then authorised him to reach a damages settlement with Taylor.

Crone told the committee of the significance of the e-mail: "Up to then there was no evidence that *News of the World* were implicated. The first I saw of that was the 'for Neville' email which reached us in spring 2008. We went to see Mr. Murdoch and it was explained to him what this document was and what it meant".

He continued, "It was clear evidence that phone hacking was taking place beyond Clive Goodman. It was the reason we had to settle the case and in order to settle the case, we had to explain the case to Mr. Murdoch and get his authority to settle, so clearly it was discussed."

The hearing was presented with yet more evidence of possible criminality at the newspaper. Crone confirmed that he saw a dossier that had been commissioned by a senior News International executive into the private lives of lawyers acting for the victims of phone hacking. The *Independent* newspaper had first brought the dossier into the public domain the previous week.

Some of the media lauded the select committee, with the *Press Gazette* describing the questioning of Crone as one of the "most gruelling sessions of questioning yet".

Such accolades are unwarranted. What is being investigated are serious allegations of criminal conduct, including phone hacking "on an industrial scale", and corruption and blackmail of police officers, public officials and leading politicians by Murdoch's media empire. Such was the scale of illegal activity that select committee member Labour Party MP Tom Watson told Parliament, "We know now that News International

had entered the criminal underworld”.

But once again, as with the case of the previous insipid questioning of the Murdochs, Crone and Myler were given a free pass. The *Independent* stated of the hearing, “one of the most oft-repeated phrases of the day was: ‘Not that I can recall, no’.”

Crone was allowed to walk away without even confirming the name of the senior figure at News International who commissioned the dossier into the private lives of lawyers. He said that this was because of the ongoing police investigation into *News of the World*.

More importantly, the *Independent* noted, “None of the four men appearing yesterday”, Crone and Myler “plus former head of legal affairs for NI, Jonathan Chapman, and NI’s former head of HR, Daniel Cloke—have been arrested.”

The *Economist* magazine commented on the contempt that the NI executives had displayed toward the select committee, noting that James Murdoch “may be recalled to Parliament to give further evidence, but his position appears to have steadied”. It added, “So, apparently, have nerves at News International. Mr Crone conveyed disdain for the MPs, particularly Tom Watson, the committee’s toughest questioner. He lectured them about the use of private investigators, and criticised statements they had made to the media. In July News International executives had the look of rabbits in the path of an oncoming car. Not any more.”

No one is being held to account for anything at all, even though Labour MP Chris Bryant said this week that he had already counted 53 lies to Parliament by News International executives, police and others.

To date, just 16 people have been arrested in relation to the phone hacking crisis and no one, let alone any senior NI figures, has been charged. On Wednesday, Raoul Simons, the deputy football editor of the *Times*, another Murdoch-owned UK newspaper, was apprehended. He was reportedly arrested on suspicion of conspiring to intercept communications and was then released on bail.

It was revealed Thursday that another central NI figure, Andy Coulson, has refused to give any further evidence to the select committee. Coulson was the former editor of *News of the World* and Prime Minister David Cameron’s former personal communications director in opposition and for a period in office.

Coulson’s lawyers released a statement citing “concerns” about “parallel inquiries and investigations and the publicity generated by them”. He had been asked by the committee to “reconsider, or make any additional comments on,” the evidence he gave to them in 2009.

Despite the answers given by Crone and Myler, it is not yet certain that James Murdoch will even be called before the select committee for further questioning. The committee is to meet next Tuesday to decide whether Murdoch will be called back to re-testify.

It is clear that the ruling elite will not carry out a serious investigation, due to the fact that all the institutions of the capitalist state—parliament, the judiciary, the police and the main political parties—are implicated in these crimes.

All have intimate relations with Murdoch’s media empire. Only this week it emerged that former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, in office from 1997 to 2007, is the godfather to Grace, Rupert Murdoch’s nine-year-old daughter. Blair was reportedly present in March last year when Murdoch’s two daughters by his third wife were baptised on the banks of the Jordan. The information was disclosed by Murdoch’s wife Wendi, who described Blair as one of his “closest friends”.

In July, the *Mail on Sunday* claimed that Tony Blair had called on his successor, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, to ask select committee member Tom Watson to back down from investigating News International. Speaking to the *Guardian* the following month, Watson said of Blair’s denial of the story, “Two or three people in the party have told me that happened”. He added, “But if Rupert Murdoch were to phone Blair to ask him to get me to back off, it wouldn’t surprise me. They’re very close.”

More than any other politician, Blair epitomised the relationship between the political class and Murdoch, based on a common economic and political agenda of giving free rein to the corporations and the City of London.



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