

More evidence of criminality by Murdoch's media empire

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30 September 2011

Fresh evidence has emerged on the extent of criminality surrounding Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* tabloid and its relations with London's Metropolitan Police (Met).

Last week, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the former Deputy Editor of the *News of the World*, Neil Wallis, was being secretly paid more than £25,000 for supplying News International with "crime exclusives" whilst he was working for the Met. For his so-called "consultancy work" with the Met involving two days a month, Wallis was paid £24,000.

Wallis' employment by the Met led in July to the resignation of then-Met Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson and his deputy, Assistant Commissioner John Yates. In their initial testimony to parliament's home affairs select committee in July, neither Stephenson nor Yates revealed the fact that Wallis had been a paid consultant.

An unnamed MP told the *Observer* newspaper at the time, "We were assured that Yates and Stephenson weren't taking money from the journalists. What we didn't know was that the journalists were taking money from the cops."

Wallis was among a small number of former *News of the World* senior figures, who were arrested in July by the Met and released without charge. He was arrested on suspicion of intercepting phone messages.

Wallis, nicknamed the "Wolfman" for his tabloid exploits, was first deputy editor, and then executive editor at the *News of the World*. He left News International in August 2009 and joined the PR firm Outside Organisation, becoming its managing director in 2010. Wallis also maintained his own PR firm, Chamy Media. It was in this capacity that Wallis was contracted to the Met from October 2009 until September 2010, to "provide strategic communication advice and support."

The *Telegraph* reported that while at the Met, Wallis received "a payment of £10,000 for a single 'crime' story." The newspaper states he also was also "paid for providing News International with details of a suspected assassination attempt on the Pope during his visit to London last year." The article claims that Wallis sold stories to other

newspapers during his stint at the Met.

The Met told the newspaper that, "during his employment, Mr Wallis was not given access to any Metropolitan Police computer systems." This attempt to play down Wallis's activity is a red herring.

Wallis was employed by the Met just months after assistant commissioner John Yates, who was nominally in charge of a "review" of a 2006 police inquiry into serious allegations of phone hacking carried out by the *News of the World*, closed down any further investigation. In doing so, Yates dismissed the concerns of even then-Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, who claimed that his phone had been hacked.

Yates was also part of a Met committee that vetted Wallis before he was allowed to take on his paid role with the police.

The revelations raise yet again the revolving door between the Murdoch press and the Met. Andy Hayman, who was in charge of the 2006 police inquiry into the allegations, then went on to work for News International as a columnist for the *Times*. Hayman was the former head of counterterrorism at the Met and a champion of the right wing "law and order" agenda trumpeted by the Murdoch media. During Hayman's period at the Met, he demanded the government pass legislation allowing the detention of people for 90 days without trial on "anti-terror" grounds.

As the phone hacking scandal has proven, all the institutions of the state, including the main political parties, are implicated. The *Telegraph* story paints a picture of the closest of relationships between Murdoch's UK papers, the Met and the Conservative Party.

Wallis was close friends with Andy Coulson, the former editor of the *News of the World*, who became Prime Minister David Cameron's director of communications, first in opposition, and then in office.

Coulson had resigned from the *News of the World* in 2007, following the jailing of the paper's royal correspondent for involvement in phone hacking. Cameron had consistently defended Coulson against allegations of wrong-doing, but in

January he was forced to step down as evidence mounted that he had approved payments for phone hacking. Despite also being arrested in July, Coulson is another News International employee that has been released without charge.

“Mr [Andy] Coulson and Mr [Neil] Wallis were close colleagues and good friends and arranged for senior Metropolitan Police officers to meet the Prime Minister’s chief of staff. It is understood that Mr Wallis also made informal representations to Mr Coulson about Scotland Yard’s views on Conservative law-and-order policies”, states the article.

In a further twist to the scandal, it has been revealed that Coulson has now initiated legal action against News Group, a subsidiary of News International, after the latter stated it planned to stop paying his legal fees.

It has not been explained why News Group would ever have committed to paying these legal fees, four years after Coulson’s employment with it ceased. It has also emerged that Coulson continued to receive severance deal payments from News International, even when he was employed by Cameron.

But the legal bill is mounting. As well as the ongoing cases against News International/News Group in Britain, preparations are underway by lawyers in the United States to begin a class action lawsuit against Rupert Murdoch’s US-based News Corporation on behalf of victims of its phone hacking activities.

Norman Siegel, formerly the head of the New York civil liberties union, is pursuing legal options in both federal and New York state courts in regard to allegations that News Corp employees bribed police in the UK. He is seeking to establish whether a class action suit can be launched in the US on behalf of the victims. A second New York lawyer, Steve Hyman, is understood to be working with Siegel as is Mark Lewis of the UK firm Taylor Hampton, who represented the family of murdered teenager Milly Dowler. It was the *Guardian*’s disclosure in July that the mobile phone of Milly Dowler had been hacked by a private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, on behalf of the *News of the World*, that triggered the current crisis.

Siegel commented, “The allegations of phone hacking and bribery against News Corporation are serious and substantial, and we will approach this initial exploration with that same seriousness”.

Siegel represents 20 9/11 families and has advised them regarding an ongoing FBI investigation of allegations, first reported by the *Daily Mirror*, that *News of the World* reporters attempted to hack into the phone records of some 9/11 victims.

The *Guardian* reported that Lewis had asked Siegel to

“seek witness statements from News Corp and its directors, including Rupert and James Murdoch, in relation to allegations that News of the World staff may have bribed police.”

As the nefarious goings-on between News Corp, the Met and politicians at the highest level continue to unravel apace; it is instructive to contrast the Met’s attitude to Wallis with its response to the *Guardian* and the journalist Amelia Hill.

Only last week, the Met sought silence and intimidate the *Guardian*, the newspaper that had originally exposed some of the endemic criminality at the *News of the World*. Acting as a law unto themselves, they attempted to force the newspaper to hand over all its documents in relation to its Milly Dowler revelations in July. A production order from the Met also asserted that *Guardian* journalist Hill had committed an offence under the Official Secrets Act by “inciting” an officer from Operation Weeting—the Met’s own investigation into phone hacking—to reveal information. The Met were eventually forced to back down from such a blatant attack on democratic rights and the freedom of the press.

Yet when it is alleged that Wallis, a former deputy editor at the *News of the World*, was using his position as an insider with access to information at the Met to sell “crime exclusives” to that very same paper and other newspapers, the response from the police is to do nothing at all.

This is despite, as the Met confirmed to the *Telegraph*, that “Wallis’s contract at Scotland Yard included a confidentiality clause, a data protection act clause and a conflict of interest clause.

“All of these clauses would prohibit him selling any information he was privy to while working at Scotland Yard.”



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