

Inquiry hears evidence of extent of phone hacking at Murdoch's News International

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The first week of the inquiry by Judge Lord Leveson into the “culture, practices and ethics” of the UK media revealed further evidence pointing to the massive extent of phone hacking at Rupert Murdoch's News International.

On November 14, counsel to the inquiry, Robert Jay QC, spoke in his opening submission of a “thriving cottage industry” of hacking that existed at the now-defunct *News of the World*. He detailed information contained in the notebooks belonging to private detective Glenn Mulcaire.

Mulcaire and then-*News of the World* royal editor Clive Goodman were jailed for six months and four months, respectively, after being found guilty of hacking voice mail messages of members of the royal family. The newspaper was closed down by Murdoch in July of this year after revelations emerged that that the phone of murdered schoolgirl Millie Dowler had been hacked in 2002.

Jay stated that Mulcaire recorded the names of 28 *News of the World* employees in the page corners of his notebooks. About 11,000 pages of notes were seized by the police from Mulcaire. In these notes are the names of 5,795 potential victims of hacking and surveillance. Jay added that a total of 2,266 “taskings” (requests for voice mail interception) appear in the notebooks.

Aside from Goodman, the most prolific users of Mulcaire's services were “corner names” listed only as “A, B, C and D,” said Jay. The counsel continued: “The scale of this activity gives rise to the powerful inference that it must have occupied Mulcaire full-time...”

Evidence is also surfacing that criminal activity was carried out not just by the *News of the World*, but may have also been carried out at the behest of the *Sun*, the Murdoch daily tabloid and sister title to the *News of the World*. Jay stated. “Part of the evidential matrix in support of his case is a corner name in the Mulcaire notebook

which simply states ‘The Sun,’ without specifying the individual working there. It has also been drawn to the Inquiry's attention there may be another corner name relating to the (*Daily*) *Mirror* (a non-Murdoch title), but this is under investigation.”

Jay's assertion that criminality may have been authorised by the *Sun* was given additional weight by the fact that the previous week, *Sun* newspaper reporter Jamie Pyatt was arrested in connection with the bribing of police. This was the first occasion that charges of criminality have gone beyond the *News of the World* to another of Murdoch's UK titles.

In a sign that the hacking was epidemic at the *News of the World*, even after the jailing of Mulcaire and Goodman, Rhodri Davies QC, representing News International, told Leveson that he was “not going to give any guarantees that there was no phone hacking by or for the *News of the World* after 2007.”

Further allegations of serious criminal activity on the part of News International emerged even as the inquiry opened. According to the *Daily Mirror* editor and *Guardian* blogger Roy Greenslade, members of the Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) select committee were put under surveillance by the *News of the World* six months ago. Greenslade said, “I do have a source who was at the *News of the World*, which was closed as a result of this debacle, and he tells me that for three days only six or seven months ago, every single member of the committee investigating this matter was followed by private eyes and/or staff of the newspaper.”

Greenslade said the surveillance was ordered by a “senior executive” at the newspaper and continued for between three and 10 days.

A report in the *Guardian* Saturday stated that David Webb, a former police officer turned private detective, was employed by News International and put hundreds of people under surveillance. Webb said that he was

commissioned by as many as 30 journalists working on the *News of the World*.

A dossier compiled by Webb that includes the names of 150 celebrities and tens of other people targeted for surveillance is to be submitted to the Leveson inquiry. According to the *Guardian*, “They will also include details of one surveillance operation that Webb undertook on behalf of the *Sun*.”

More allegations that evidence relating to the hacking scandal may have been destroyed were reported by the *Daily Mail* Saturday. Jeremy Reed, the barrister representing a number of phone hacking victims, told a pre-trial hearing into civil damages test cases to be heard in January that computers used by *News of the World* journalists were destroyed by putting them “through a grinder.” The PCs were destroyed during a move from the newspaper's headquarters in east London to a nearby office.

Only one PC, that of show business reporter Dan Evans, still exists, Reed told the court. While the *Mail* reports that “vital internal emails are believed to have been copied and kept on servers outside the building,” the fact that PCs were being destroyed is of a piece with allegations that thousands, and perhaps millions, of emails relating to the scandal have been erased by News International.

It also testifies to the kid gloves treatment of News International over many years by the police and ruling elite. Despite reports of the destruction of potentially incriminating evidence, no computers have been impounded, no hard-drives seized, and no minutes of board meetings subpoenaed.

That even the most basic steps are not being taken in prosecuting the leading figures at News International is laid bare by the investigations currently being carried out by London's Metropolitan Police. It is involved in three inquiries relating to News International. One is Operation Weeting, into the phone-hacking itself, Operation Elveden, into allegations of corrupt payments by journalists to police officers, and Operation Tuleta, into the possibility that emails may have been intercepted. Of the 5,700 potential victims, just 600 phone-hacking victims have been interviewed by police.

The Met is tasked with analysing some 300 million News International emails as part of its investigations. Yet just 100 police officers have been assigned to these inquiries. The new Metropolitan police commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe, said that no deadlines were in place to complete the inquiries. On the basis of the

resources allocated by the Met, the completion of its investigations could take decades. Earlier this month, Hogan-Howe found time to joke, “If it takes 10 years, I won't be here by then. I can't tell you when it will finish.”

The convening of the Leveson Inquiry must also be seen in the context of the refusal of the British political elite to conduct any serious investigation and the lack of criminal charges against the guilty. The inquiry was authorised by Conservative Party Prime Minister David Cameron prior to the parliamentary recess. The terms of the inquiry were agreed with the leader of the Labour Party opposition, Ed Miliband.

No investigation of the actual hacking at *News of the World* is to be made until the Metropolitan Police have concluded all their investigations. Leveson said in July that he was sceptical whether he would even be able to publish his findings within a year. It is estimated that he will report in late 2012.

Instead, Leveson's inquiry will end up calling for press restrictions. He announced the inquiry by saying its focus “is the culture, practices and ethics of the press in the context of the latter's relationship with the public, the police and politicians”—making clear that the “press” also includes the Internet.

Leveson stated last week that his inquiry will be based, first and foremost, on the question of “who guards the guardians.” He added, “I have absolutely no wish to stifle freedom of speech or expression, but I anticipate that monitoring will take place of press coverage over the coming months and it might be necessary to conclude that those vital rights are being abused.”

Cameron has already pre-authorized restrictions on the press, stating that if Leveson's inquiry were to recommend full statutory regulation of the press then he would support it.



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