

New stage in Murdoch scandal as former News of the World editor Rebekah Brooks re-arrested

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Rebekah Brooks, the former chief executive of Rupert Murdoch's News International, was arrested Tuesday morning on suspicion of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

She and her husband Charlie were among six people arrested by officers assigned to Operation Weeting, looking into illegal phone-hacking by the now defunct *News of the World*. Brooks was arrested last July on suspicion of conspiring to intercept communications.

Police also rearrested Neville Thurlbeck, another News International journalist first arrested last April, as well as News International's head of security Mark Hanna.

Brooks was the editor of the *News of the World* before becoming News International's chief executive on July 15, 2011. News International is the British arm of Murdoch's News Corp empire and publishes three newspapers, the *Times*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Sun*. It published the *News of the World* until the latter was closed down amid the hacking scandal last November. The company represents only a small part of Murdoch's global empire, News Corp, which has annual revenue of \$31 billion and assets totalling \$60 billion.

Fear of contagion extending to Murdoch and his son, James, have made shielding Brooks from charges of wrongdoing a key concern for the media mogul.

The Metropolitan Police's latest arrests raise the stakes. Conspiring to pervert the course of justice is a far more serious charge than that of conspiring to intercept communications. It brings the total number of arrests in Operation Weeting and its linked inquiries to 45.

An inquiry under Lord Justice Leveson was set up

last July by Prime Minister David Cameron under pressure from the public when it came to light that a *News of the World* journalist had hacked into the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's phone.

By calling the inquiry, Cameron intended to kick the growing scandal over News International's phone-hacking on an "industrial scale" and bribing of police officers into the long grass. But 12 weeks in and the inquiry threatens to drag Cameron himself into centre stage and engulf him in a political maelstrom that could even cost him the premiership.

Cameron is known to be a close friend of the Brookses. He attended Eton with horse trainer Charlie Brooks and often went horseback riding with them on their farm in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. Rebekah Brooks has attended cabinet as a visitor. She also enjoyed close relations with Tony and Cherie Blair, in an extension of Labour's close ties with Murdoch himself.

In 2007, while still opposition leader, Cameron took on ex-*News of the World* editor Andy Coulson as his chief of staff. Coulson had to resign from the post because of the scandal and he too was arrested last July. There are now calls for Cameron himself to attend the Leveson Inquiry.

The most significant testimony to have emerged from the inquiry alleges that the Blair government had known about the phone-hacking all along and suppressed this knowledge.

Last Thursday Peter Clark, the Metropolitan Police's ex-deputy assistant commissioner, informed Leveson that a confidential report on the phone-hacking discoveries had been sent to John Reid, then Labour's home secretary, as early as 2006.

That original investigation was known as Operation Caryatid. Clark claims he provided Reid with a briefing paper and another was written by the private secretary to the Home Office's permanent secretary. This detailed widespread illegal phone hacking by News International, including that of Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

Clark explained the briefing was also sent to the cabinet office at Number 10 [Downing Street, the prime minister's residence] and to the secret service at MI5. He told the inquiry, "I am absolutely clear in my mind that Her Majesty's government was fully aware of this case at the time... I recall discussing the case with Dr. John Reid, the then Home Secretary, shortly after Goodman and Mulcaire had been arrested [in August 2006]. This was in the margins of a meeting about broader counter terrorism issues".

Clive Goodman was formerly *News of the World* royal editor and Glenn Mulcaire is a private detective involved in the phone-hacking. Both were imprisoned in January 2007.

Clark was asked, "Did you make it clear to him that although the investigation had clearly and conclusively implicated Goodman and Mulcaire, a: the range of victim was far wider than the Royal household, and b: that other journalists might well have been involved?"

He answered, "I think it [the discussion] did".

Leveson demanded that the Reid report be handed over to the inquiry.

In his own testimony, Reid insisted, "I can categorically say that I did not receive any briefing from the Met suggesting that there was widespread hacking including MPs and the deputy [prime minister]".

The suspended Metropolitan Police communications chief, Dick Federcio, told Leveson that work experience placement and jobs were provided at News International for relations of senior police officers.

The former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson told the hearing that contact between some senior colleagues and the written media had been "closer than he would have liked". They had leaked stories that had been "deeply unhelpful and added a continuing dialogue of disharmony within the Met".

Stephenson was forced to resign in July due to his close relations with Neil Wallis, the executive editor of the *News of the World*, including hiring him as a

consultant.

Elizabeth Filkin, a former parliamentary standards commissioner, told Leveson that it was not a proper thing for public servants to be seen to be receiving "a lot of hospitality from individuals or businesses". There was a feeling that some senior officers were "filling their boots".

Former Met chief Lord Paul Condon said that police leaks to the press were already a concern when he was commissioner, between 1993 and 2000, but insisted that "a massive bureaucratic overreaction of police having to record all contact with the media should be avoided".

The inquiry heard that Lord John Stevens, Met Commissioner between 2000 and 2005, had his autobiography serialised in the *News of the World* and wrote columns at £7,000 per article.

Most tellingly, Stevens warned the inquiry that if police did not utilise the services provided by the media after an incident like a police shooting, "then the whole thing will just escalate in a way that leads to massive public disorder... The message must be out there as quickly as you can of why the police did what they did, and the media have to be the major part of doing that".

Former Assistant Commissioner Robert Quick stated bluntly that he and others became concerned about relationships between officers and journalists. "It became apparent that some officers were being bribed", he said.

The leading representatives of the Met have provided a revealing insight as to how successive governments have come to rely heavily on the partnership with the police and the Murdoch media in a conspiracy against democratic rights and the interests of the working class.



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