

Leveson inquiry: Damning evidence of political corruption of Labour and Conservative parties

Robert Stevens
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The charging of former editor Rebekah Brooks with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice during the police investigation into the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal has overshadowed revealing testimony given at the Leveson inquiry into press ethics.

Alastair Campbell, director of communications under former Prime Minister Tony Blair, gave testimony to the inquiry on Monday, the day before Brooks was charged along with her husband Charlie and four others.

Blair was famously close to the Murdoch media empire, travelling in 1995 as leader of the Opposition to address News Corporation senior executives at the luxury Hayman Island resort in Queensland. There he pledged an end to the “rigid economic planning and state controls” of the “Old Left” and declared that “the battle between market and public sector is over.”

Two years later, Murdoch officially endorsed Blair and “New Labour” in his daily tabloid *The Sun*, switching his 18-years of allegiance to the Conservative government. In 2011, Blair became godfather to Murdoch’s youngest child.

In his previous testimony to Leveson in November, Campbell had attempted to distance himself from sections of the British press, describing them as “frankly putrid.” During his latest appearance, however, he was asked by Robert Jay Q.C, “Was the *Sun* ever fed stories by you?”

Campbell replied, “Yeah. So were other papers. I would say that we were one of the prime sources for every media organisation in the country.”

Speaking about Blair’s visit to Hayman Island to solicit Murdoch’s support, Campbell said, “I was never in doubt that it was a good thing to do.”

He claimed there was no “express deal” between Blair and Murdoch in the run-up to the 1997 election. But this is contradicted by Campbell’s own written statement to the inquiry. Referring to an article Blair wrote in the *Sun* in March 1997, just two months before the general election, he wrote, “It was made clear to me by the editor that if Mr. Blair were to emphasise the point that there would be no entry into the euro without a specific referendum on the issue, and that he understood people’s fears about a so-called European superstate, it was likely to be the final piece of the jigsaw before Mr. Murdoch agreed the paper would back Labour.”

Campbell maintained close relations with senior News International figures, including Rebekah Brooks, confirming to the inquiry that of her two weddings, “I attended the reception for the first one and the wedding for the second.”

He told the inquiry that he had been on “very friendly” terms with Brooks and had spoken to her on “average, probably once or twice” a week during her period as editor of *The Sun*.

In June 2007, Gordon Brown, Blair’s chancellor, took over as prime minister. Murdoch switched allegiance from Labour to the Conservatives in 2009 and in May the following year, Brown stepped down after losing the general election. As part of the process of abandoning Brown politically, he was personally targeted by Murdoch’s UK newspapers.

While relations between Murdoch and Brown were to become ever more fractious, the break was entirely of the media mogul’s devising. The testimony given at the Leveson inquiry by *Sky News* political editor Adam

Boulton gives a flavour of just how far Brown was prepared to go to maintain intimate relations with the Murdoch group.

He recounted how he first heard about a “slumber party” organised in 2008 at 10 Downing Street by Brown’s wife, Sarah. Among the guests were Murdoch’s wife, Wendi Deng, and his daughter Elizabeth. Boulton said, “I just thought, ‘This is completely bonkers that this sort of intimacy is being indulged in between the prime minister and the prime minister’s wife and a senior proprietor’s wife... I thought it would end in tears.’”

Boulton told the inquiry that the annual News Corp summer party was central to the calendar of every prime minister and opposition leader, without exception. “I see nothing wrong in holding a party or inviting people to it, I was a little surprised that they all felt the need to turn up,” he said.

Fawning before Murdoch continued unabated, even as the rampant criminality taking place at News International became public. Boulton commented, “Last summer, I was at the News Corporation party and one saw the leader of the opposition, the prime minister [Conservative David Cameron] and all the other people turning up, as it were, to pay court.”

Senior police officers were as involved as politicians in this orgy of sycophancy and corruption.

In March the Leveson inquiry widened the scope of its hearings to cover allegations of bribery of police officers and other public officials. The first to give evidence was Sue Akers, deputy assistant commissioner at the Metropolitan Police. She acknowledged, “There appears to have been a culture at the *Sun* of illegal payments and systems created to facilitate those payments.”

Evidence has emerged that the practise of bribing police officers was so rife that the Metropolitan Police was forced to initiate Operation Elveden to investigate “any alleged inappropriate payments to police and public officials.”

Another figure whose evidence may be heard at the Leveson inquiry is Paul Maley, who worked as a News International chauffeur for four years until 2009. According to information obtained by the *Daily Mail*, Maley alleges that for several years he personally delivered packages of illegal cash payments to Metropolitan Police officers.

Daily Mail states that “between 2006 ~~and~~ 2007 Mr. Maley alleges that he delivered a total of 17 packages containing cash to ten police officers stationed around London. Mr. Maley says he only realised that he was delivering money during the third journey. This was when he opened a package and counted up to £3,000 before resealing it. He estimates that it probably contained around £5,000 in total.”

The article reports that last September Maley had a 40-minute meeting with his constituency MP, Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt, in which he told him that he had personally handed over more than a dozen packages containing cash to police officers while working for News International.

The *Mail* reports that Maley told Hunt that his lawyers were in possession of a “black book” used by News International drivers. It “contained the names of the allegedly corrupt officers. He [Maley] said it was being kept under ‘lock and key’ in a secret location.”

The article adds, “Mr. Maley claimed in the meeting that since passing his information to the police he had become the target of a ‘campaign of intimidation’ designed to deter him from identifying the officers who took the payments—including threatening phone calls, damage to his car and even dog excrement posted through his letterbox.”

According to the *Mail*, Maley claims that Hunt “fobbed him off.”

Maley’s accusations emerge as Hunt is seeking to defend himself against allegations of collusion with Murdoch’s News Corporation. E-mails obtained from News International and handed to the Leveson inquiry reveal that shortly after Murdoch announced his bid to take over the pay TV channel BSkyB in July 2010, Hunt’s special advisor, Adam Smith, assured the billionaire mogul that “the UK government would be supportive throughout the process.”

Hunt was meant to be acting in an impartial quasi-judicial capacity in relation to the bid.



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