

Former aide to British PM criminally charged in Murdoch phone-hacking scandal

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Former editors Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson are among eight people facing criminal prosecution for their involvement in the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced yesterday that they are to appear in court after being charged with 19 offences.

The *News of the World* was published by Rupert Murdoch's News International, the British subsidiary of News Corp. The others charged are former managing editor Stuart Kuttner, former news editor Greg Miskiw, former assistant editor Ian Edmondson, former chief reporter Neville Thurlbeck, former assistant editor James Weatherup and private investigator Glenn Mulcaire. They are all due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on 16 August.

The charging of Brooks and Coulson is a major political crisis for the Conservative-led government of Prime Minister David Cameron. Cameron is a long-time friend of Brooks and her husband. Brooks is on record that she met Cameron at 22 semi-official events during the past six years. More than half of these meetings took place while Cameron was seeking the support of the Murdoch media empire prior to taking office.

Cameron has even closer links with Coulson, who was hired as the Conservative Party director of communications in July 2007. According to sources, Coulson was given this position after Brooks lobbied on his behalf. It later emerged that he was employed in this capacity while still being paid by News International, receiving several hundred thousand pounds from them.

Coulson's services were retained and he became Cameron's director of communications after the May 2010 election victory. He was the prime minister's highest paid special advisor, with a salary of £140,000.

He was forced to resign in January last year as further details of his alleged involvement in phone hacking by News International continued to emerge.

The Labour Party is likewise in crisis over the phone hacking scandal. All the illegal acts attributed to the eight defendants were allegedly carried out during the period 1997-2010, when the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown maintained intimate contact with Murdoch's publishing empire. Brooks is a friend of leading figures in the Labour Party, including former Prime Minister Blair and his wife Cherie. Blair's successor, Gordon Brown, attended her 2009 wedding to Charlie Brooks, alongside Cameron.

In a statement, Brooks denied the charges against her and claimed she "did not authorise, nor was I aware of, phone-hacking under my editorship." Coulson said he would fight the charges.

Brooks and Coulson are charged, among other things, with involvement in the accessing of the voicemails of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler in 2002. The charges against Brooks and Coulson related to hacking Milly Dowler's phone also involve Stuart Kuttner, Glenn Mulcaire, Greg Miskiw and Neville Thurlbeck.

All, with the exception of Mulcaire, will be charged with conspiring to intercept communications without lawful authority from 3 October 2000 to 9 August 2006. The communications allegedly intercepted are the voicemail messages of well-known people and those associated with them.

Mulcaire is to face four charges relating to the hacking of Dowler's phone and that of three other people. Mulcaire and the *News of the World*'s former royal editor, Clive Goodman, were both jailed in 2006 for illegally accessing mobile phone messages of the royal family.

In an indication of how widespread the illegal

activities of News International were, the CPS revealed that the eight people named face charges relating to more than 600 victims between 2000 and 2006. These may be just the tip of the iceberg. The Metropolitan Police has in its possession notebooks belonging to Mulcaire containing 11,000 pages of notes and the names of 5,795 potential victims of hacking and surveillance.

London's Metropolitan Police announced that 74 people have been arrested to date in connection with phone hacking and illicit payments to police officers and other public figures.

Brooks, who was the *News of the World* editor between 2000 and 2003, and then editor of its sister daily paper, *The Sun*, until 2009, faces three charges relating to the alleged accessing of phones belonging to Dowler and former Fire Brigades Union leader Andrew Gilchrist.

Coulson, successor to Brooks from 2003 to 2007, is charged with involvement in illegally hacking Dowler's phone, those of former Labour Party home secretaries David Blunkett and Charles Clarke, and that of Calum Best, the son of the late soccer player George Best.

In May, Brooks and her husband were charged, along with four other people, with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, in connection with the phone hacking scandal.

The Metropolitan Police have much to hide from any serious investigation. From 2009 the *Guardian* newspaper published information detailing the scale of the alleged hacking. Despite this, the Metropolitan Police decided that "no additional evidence" had "come to light" and refused to open a new inquiry. This was three years after the Met held another so-called "investigation" and shut it down after the prosecution of Mulcaire and Goodman.

Last July, Brian Paddick, the former metropolitan police deputy assistant commissioner, said he knew of officers collecting up to £30,000 at a time in envelopes at the McDonalds restaurant near the News International headquarters. It is alleged that Coulson, who was the editor of *News of the World* between 2003 and 2007, authorised the payments.

What has also emerged is that there was a revolving door between the Murdoch press and the Met. Andy Hayman, assistant commissioner for specialist

operations, who was in charge of the 2006 police inquiry, went on to work for News International as a columnist for the *Times*.

Since the exposure of the vast extent of the phone hacking and allegations of associated criminal activity, the British political elite and the police have sought to block the bringing of criminal charges—a strategy that has now failed.

Last July, Cameron hastily announced a public inquiry into the allegations, to be headed by Lord Justice Leveson. The inquiry, whose terms were agreed with opposition Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, was to include an examination of press ethics and the practices of the media in relation to the public, politicians and police. It was confirmed that no issue of the actual hacking at *News of the World* would be made until the Metropolitan Police had concluded their own investigations.

As the CPS were announcing the charges against Brooks, Coulson, et. al., Leveson announced that his inquiry had completed its work, after 102 days and after reviewing 6,000 pages of evidence and hearing 650 witnesses. Giving no date for when his findings will be drawn up, Leveson said additional hearings could be held over the next few months if any events occurred related to the inquiry's work.



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