Leveson report whitewashes collusion in media's criminal activity

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The report issued Thursday by Lord Justice Leveson, 17 months on preparation and running to nearly 2,000 pages and a million words, is distinguished chiefly by the brazen character of its exoneration of the political elite and of the police.

Set up by Prime Minister David Cameron in July 2011 following damning revelations of widespread phone hacking and other illegal activities at Rupert Murdoch's now defunct *News of the World* (NoW), the inquiry was always intended to be a whitewash.

Strictly limited to investigate the "culture, practice and ethics" of the UK media in general, the aim was to obscure not only the widespread criminality and corrupt practices that pervaded the NoW and its parent company, News International, but also the police and the entire body politic.

Not only had senior officers rejected requests for investigations into evidence of phone hacking—including policemen who subsequently went on to work for News International—but there was evidence of bribery of police and other officials.

Equally damning was the evidence of the intimate relations of all the major parties with Murdoch and the way that he was able to dictate the policies of successive governments. Cameron employed former NoW editor Andy Coulson as his director of communications, and enjoyed a close friendship with former News International boss Rebekah Brooks.

In this the Tories only emulated the close relations established between the billionaire reactionary and Tony Blair and his Labour government, under whose watch many of the crimes perpetrated by News International were perpetrated.

Involved in these relations was a common political agenda based on destroying the social and democratic rights of working people in the interests of a fabulously wealthy elite.

It was in order to obscure these fundamental issues that the restricted terms of reference for the inquiry were agreed upon by Cameron, his Liberal Democrat coalition partners and Labour Party leader Ed Miliband.

Leveson's report now states that the allegations of criminal wrongdoing cannot be addressed until the Metropolitan Police have concluded their own investigations. But this investigation is not set to conclude for years, given the scale of the illegality being looked into and the all too deliberate paucity of the resources dedicated to the investigation by the police.

Leveson acknowledges that, as of October 31, more than 90 people had been arrested (now more than 100), including police officers targeted in three separate ongoing investigations relating to the crimes uncovered at News International. Incredibly, he then proceeds to give the police a clean bill of health. "I am satisfied that I have seen no basis for challenging at any stage the integrity of the police, or that of the senior police officers concerned," he states.

Glossing over why the police dropped a 2006 investigation into allegation of mass phone hacking at NoW and then did so again in 2009, after an article in the *Guardian* alleged a cover-up, Leveson writes, "The police (who had perfectly reasonably decided to limit the prosecutions in 2006 not least because of their incredible workload that was a consequence of terrorism) decided that there was no new evidence contained within the article even to justify a review."

The Leveson Inquiry was hastily called in response to public outrage after it was revealed that the NoW hacked the mobile phone of murdered 13-year-old schoolgirl Milly Dowler as far back as 2002. This crime was the sordid tip of the iceberg, as numerous reports emerged documenting the Murdoch press's bribery, blackmail and intimidation.

In 2006, Glenn Mulcaire, a private investigator used by

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the NoW, and the paper's former royal editor, Clive Goodman, were jailed for illegally accessing mobile phone messages of the royal family. In July 2007, Cameron hired Coulson as his director of communications. He became Cameron's director of communications after the May 2010 election victory, the prime minister's highest paid special advisor with a salary of £140,000.

On the very day of the publication of Leveson's report, Brooks and Coulson appeared in court over alleged illegal payments to public officials alongside Goodman, the *Sun* journalist John Kay and Ministry of Defence official Bettina Jordan-Barber. It is alleged that Brooks, Kay and Jordan-Barber conspired to pay approximately £100,000 to Jordan-Barber for information between 2004 and 2011.

Brooks and Coulson are among eight people charged with 19 counts of conspiracy over the phone-hacking scandal, while Brooks and her husband Charlie are charged separately of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice by concealing evidence from the police.

Among others arrested in Operation Elveden, the Metropolitan police's investigation into claims of unlawful payments by News International staff to police officers and other public officials, are 21 journalists at the *Sun*, a member of the armed forces, a prison official, and police officers.

Leveson heard or read testimony alluding to numerous crimes from hundreds of people. Yet the report's executive summary passes over in one sentence the fact that an estimated 829 people are regarded as likely victims of phone hacking.

In line with Leveson's own expunging of the vast criminality involved in the phone hacking scandal, the media and the major parties have also focused almost exclusively on a discussion of what kind of press regulation is now required in the UK.

Leveson calls for the media to establish a form of self-regulation based on the creation of on an "independent" body, but to be underpinned by parliamentary regulation.

The Socialist Equality Party opposes all moves towards government regulation of the media, as now called for by Labour. The real purpose of such efforts would not be to bring to book Murdoch et al, but to suppress oppositional views and any information that threatens the interests of the ruling elite. That is why the Internet was specifically included in Leveson's remit.

The abuses carried out by the press were of a criminal character and those responsible should have been prosecuted long ago under existing legislation. This did not happen, because the British press is controlled by billionaire oligarchs who use their vast wealth to buy influence over the police and politicians.

Working people should also dismiss with contempt the efforts of Cameron and others to portray their opposition to statutory regulation as a defence of "freedom of speech." These are the same people who have supported the introduction of the most draconian attacks on civil liberties over the past decades in the name of the "war on terror."

They preside over a complex system of highly secretive legislation that includes issuing D-Notices (Defence Advisory Notices) preventing the publication of stories deemed detrimental to the national interest, "super-injunctions" that allow wealthy individuals to do the same without anyone knowing of it, and some of the most punitive libel legislation in the world. All they are defending is the freedom of operation of their billionaire backers.

The real attitude of the British ruling elite to press freedoms is evidenced by their efforts to destroy the reputation of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as part of efforts to close down the WikiLeaks site and extradite Assange to Sweden on trumped-up charges of sexual abuse. Assange has been targeted because he published evidence of war crimes that would have either fallen foul of the secret censors or which the media would have voluntarily concealed. He is trapped in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and suffering from deteriorating health in order that Cameron's government, with Labour's backing, are prevented from arranging his extradition to the United States to be tried for espionage. Assange's name is, of course, not mentioned in Leveson's report into the "ethics" of the media.

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