

Guardian faces parliamentary investigation over Snowden revelations

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Britain's *Guardian* newspaper is facing an investigation by at least one parliamentary committee, in line with demands made by Prime Minister David Cameron, concerning the exposures of Edward Snowden, the whistleblower from America's National Security Agency (NSA).

Accompanied with calls for criminal prosecutions and assertions of the newspaper's having compromised national security, the move is a major escalation in the witch-hunt and clampdown launched in response to Snowden's revelations of mass surveillance programmes operated by the NSA and Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

On Wednesday, Cameron told parliament, "I think the plain fact is that what has happened has damaged national security, and in many ways the *Guardian* themselves admitted that when they agreed, when asked politely by my national security adviser and Cabinet Secretary [Sir Jeremy Heywood] to destroy the files they had, they went ahead and destroyed those files.

"So they know that what they are dealing with is dangerous for national security."

The prime minister supported calls for a full parliamentary inquiry to determine whether the *Guardian* broke the law by printing Snowden's revelations.

Cameron's claim is as barefaced a lie as it is a reactionary move.

In June, according to *Guardian* editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger, he and other *Guardian* journalists were threatened with legal action and forced to destroy hard drives containing material from Snowden when "a very senior government official claiming to represent the views of the prime minister" made "an implicit threat that others within government and Whitehall favoured a far more draconian approach."

According to Rusbridger, "two GCHQ security experts" oversaw the destruction. Now, Cameron cites the newspaper's response to the government's threats as proof of its guilt!

A spokesman for Guardian News and Media issued a statement declaring, "The prime minister is wrong to say the *Guardian* destroyed computer files because we agreed our reporting was damaging. We destroyed the computers because the government said it would use the full force of the law to prevent a newspaper from publishing anything about the NSA or GCHQ."

Cameron made his statement in response to a question from former defence secretary Dr. Liam Fox, who asked for a "full and transparent assessment about whether the *Guardian's* involvement in the Snowden affair has damaged Britain's national security." Making clear he was seeking criminal charges, Fox said it was "bizarre" that people alleged to have taken part in newspaper phone hacking have been prosecuted, while people who leave security personnel "more vulnerable" have not.

Tory backbencher Julian Smith has been granted a parliamentary debate in Westminster Hall next Tuesday over the publishing of the top-secret documents. He earlier wrote to the Metropolitan Police calling for the *Guardian* to be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act and the Terrorism Act 2000. He said he would use the debate to "lay out the reasons why I believe that the *Guardian* has crossed the line between responsible journalism and seriously risking our national security and the lives of those who seek to protect us."

The Liberal Democrat leader and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg has already aligned himself with the moves against the *Guardian*, declaring that Snowden's leaks have "gifted" terrorists with the ability to attack Britain. The calls for repression are

being made in conjunction with the Security services. New head of MI5 Andrew Parker described leaks about the Prism and Tempora programmes as handing “the advantage to the terrorists. It is the gift they need to evade us and strike at will.”

The most significant support for state persecution of journalists, newspapers and whistleblowers such as Snowden again comes from the nominal “parliamentary opposition”, the Labour Party.

Following the debate in parliament, Fox wrote to the chairmen of five Commons select committees urging them to carry out an investigation into the *Guardian*’s “reckless and potentially dangerous conduct.”

“A free press does not mean the freedom to make the UK, its people or its allies more vulnerable to serious organised crime or terrorism. I am writing to formally request, as both a Member of Parliament and a former Security of State for Defence, that your committee considers the elements of the *Guardian*’s involvement in, and publication of, the Snowden leaks.”

The first response came from Labour’s Keith Vaz, chairman of the Home Affairs Committee.

Within hours, Vaz said he would look into “elements of the *Guardian*’s involvement in, and publication of, the Snowden leaks.”

“I will be writing to assure Dr. Fox that the committee is currently conducting an inquiry into counter-terrorism and we will be looking at this matter as part of it.”

The other committee heads petitioned by Fox are Sir Malcolm Rifkind of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), John Arbuthnot of the Defence Committee, Richard Ottaway at Foreign Affairs and Sir Alan Beith of the Liaison Select Committee.

The ISC is presently making a pose of investigating the extent of mass surveillance carried out by the GCHQ and NSA in an inquiry launched yesterday. It has been heavily criticised for its cosy relationship with the security services, forcing Rifkind to issue platitudes such as the need to strike a “balance” between “our individual right to privacy and our collective right to security.”

The committee is now supposed to determine whether the intelligence laws are “fit for purpose”.

The move by the Home Affairs Committee to investigate the *Guardian* for possible criminal action cuts through such a pose of impartiality.

The entire machinery of parliament and its parties are being lined up in defence of the secret state apparatus, beginning with a clampdown on press freedom. Its implications for democratic rights are chilling. The *Guardian* is being targeted for revealing criminal actions by the secret services targeting every man, woman, and child in the UK and internationally for unwarranted state surveillance. This is done without legal justification or even official sanction by parliament. This demonstrates that the United Kingdom has gone far down the road to a de facto police state. It testifies to the extraordinary political and moral decay of a ruling elite poisoned by wealth, which lives in mortal fear of the millions below them being plunged ever deeper into hardship and poverty.



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