

No further prosecutions in UK phone hacking scandal

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18 December 2015

The UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has announced it will not pursue any further charges against Rupert Murdoch's News Group and the rival Mirror Group over the phone hacking scandal.

A statement on behalf of the CPS from Alison Saunders, director of public prosecutions, said there was "insufficient evidence" to bring corporate liability charges against News Group. The CPS, the principal public prosecuting agency for England and Wales, also announced it would not prosecute 10 former journalists employed by Trinity Mirror, including former *Daily Mirror* editor Piers Morgan.

The decision means that Murdoch and every other senior figure in his News UK (formerly News International–NI) operations have gotten off scot-free, despite evidence of the heinous crimes committed. The CPS's statement brings to an end an unprecedented cover-up of criminal activity. It is proof that Murdoch and the oligarchy he represents are above the law.

Over the last four years, every effort was made to ensure that Murdoch and his flunkies would escape justice. Successive governments, the judiciary and London's Metropolitan Police all bent their knee.

This was summed up in the treatment of Rebekah Brooks.

Brooks was editor of Murdoch's now-defunct *News of the World* tabloid from 2000 to 2003, and his daily the *Sun* from 2003 to 2009, before becoming CEO of NI from 2009 to 2011. An intimate friend of Murdoch's, former Labour prime minister Tony Blair and Conservative prime minister David Cameron, she was forced to resign when the hacking scandal broke. She was arrested by police on suspicion of conspiring to intercept communications and accused of corruption involving illicit payments to police officers.

Last year, in an extraordinarily perverse verdict,

Brooks was cleared of all charges by a jury that accepted her plea of "incompetence".

Murdoch threw millions of pounds at defending Brooks and his other employees, obtaining the best legal team available. He rewarded Brooks with £11 million as "compensation for loss of office" and within a year reinstated her as CEO of News UK.

With Murdoch given a clean bill of health by the CPS, the last remaining threat of a criminal trial was on the charge of corporate liability against his UK newspaper operations. The CPS ruled this out, stating that under UK law a "company will only be liable if it can be proved that the individual involved is sufficiently senior, usually close to or at board level, to be the 'controlling mind and will' of the company."

Everyone is now expected to believe that no senior figures in Murdoch's operations knew at any stage that any criminal activity, on what was described as an "industrial" scale, was taking place. The CPS stressed, "[T]here is no evidence to suggest that any member of the Board of NGN [News Group Newspapers] had knowledge of phone hacking when it was taking place. *Knowledge gleaned after the fact is not sufficient* " (emphasis added).

In July 2011, Labour Party MP Tom Watson alleged that NI was involved in attempts to destroy incriminatory e-mail evidence, while police confirmed they were investigating the alleged deletion, by a News International executive, of millions of e-mails from an internal archive in India.

None of this was considered worthy of investigation, with the CPS statement blithely declaring, "There are legitimate reasons for companies to have an email deletion policy. In this case, there is no evidence to suggest that email deletion was undertaken in order to pervert the course of justice."

Saunders noted in her statement, “There has been considerable public concern about phone hacking and invasion of privacy”.

This drastically understates the true picture. In 2011, the CPS was forced to begin its four-year legal investigation following the ongoing exposure of rampant criminality by employees at the *News of the World*. It was established that News International employees carried out or authorised the systematic hacking of thousands of phones and computers. The newspaper targeted a wide range of victims, from politicians and members of the royal family to the families of murder victims and soldiers killed in Afghanistan. According to attorneys, up to 7,000 people had their phones hacked and their privacy invaded.

Even before Brooks’ trial, Murdoch’s parent company, News Corp, had already paid out £268 million to alleged victims of phone hacking. At that time, 718 people had settled claims with News International.

As well as hacking, employees of the newspaper also made illegal payments of tens of thousands of pounds a time to police officers in return for confidential information.

The criminality involved went right to the top and threatened to engulf the entire political elite in the most all-encompassing scandal in British history. Cameron was personally implicated in the crisis, having hired Andy Coulson as his director of communications in July 2007—just seven months after Coulson resigned as editor of the *News of the World*. Coulson was editor when most of the thousands of revealed instances of phone hacking took place, and as police were being bribed for information.

The premises of Murdoch’s gutter press should have been declared a crime scene, with all major figures involved in the crisis arrested and questioned under oath. Instead, Murdoch and his son James, News Corporation’s deputy CEO, were treated with kid gloves during a polite questioning session by Parliament’s Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee.

The victims of the crimes perpetrated by the Murdoch press and working people will be disgusted by the statement of News UK in response to the CPS decision: “We now relish the chance to focus fully on what this

company does best—world class professional journalism.”

The CPS investigation is estimated to have cost more than £100 million, yet resulted in the prosecution of just nine minor figures. Coulson was prosecuted and jailed, as a token fall guy, but even he got just 18 months imprisonment and served less than 5.

Criminality was not confined to Murdoch publications. It is expected that more than 100 alleged victims of phone hacking will make claims against the publisher of the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, despite the CPS ruling. Up to 50 people are suing the *Daily Mirror* over alleged phone hacking, with the Trinity Mirror forced to set aside some £41 million, up from an initial £28 million, in order to settle claims.

The decision demonstrates the extent to which Britain is run by an oligarchy, in which all the institutions of the capitalist state serve only the interests of an unaccountable financial elite who wallow in obscene levels of luxury at the expense of an increasingly pauperised population.

In a July 2011 WSWS Perspective column, we warned presciently: “Any inquiry under the control of the existing political establishment will be a cover-up, aiming to protect News International and its allies in the political establishment and state apparatus.

“Justice will be secured, and the predatory and socially destructive activities of the media barons halted, only in connection with the development of a mass political movement of the working class that sets out to remove from power an elite which has demonstrated that it is entirely unfit to rule.”

Further coverage of the Murdoch media scandal can be found here.



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