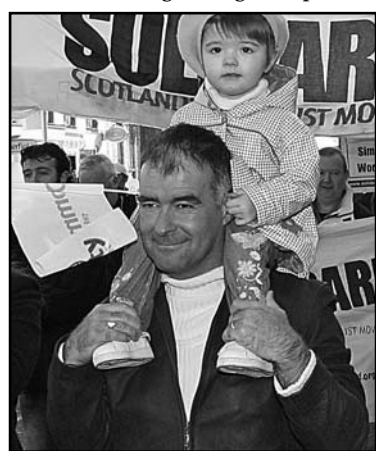


Phone hacking and media spin - the murky world of Andy Coulson

THE NEWS of the World (NoW) phone hacking scandal has claimed the job of Andy Coulson, David Cameron's spin doctor-in-chief. Coulson was editor of the NoW when one of its reporters, Clive Goodman, and a private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, were jailed for illegally accessing voicemail messages.

Philip Stott,
Socialist Party Scotland

Coulson resigned as editor but claimed he knew nothing of these activities that were supposedly confined to a single "rogue reporter"



Tommy Sheridan.

on the paper. He then went on to become Tory leader David Cameron's chief media advisor. He was appointed top communications director for the government when the Con-Dem coalition came to power in May 2010.

Coulson was forced by the defence to give evidence in the recent Tommy Sheridan perjury trial and again denied any knowledge of phone hacking. This is despite the fact that Glenn Mulcaire had Tommy Sheridan's phone and PIN number in his files when Coulson was editor of the News of the World.

Tommy Sheridan's legal representatives have demanded the authorities now review Coulson's evidence in the light of his resignation and the tsunami of evidence now coming to light that phone hacking was endemic at the NoW. We'll see if the police and the legal establishment pursue Coulson for perjury with the same iron determination as they did when waging a vendetta against Tommy Sheridan.

Rupert Murdoch's News International and News Corp Group have spent the last year fighting an increasingly un-winnable battle based on lies and cover-up. They have denied using illegal methods, but a series of legal cases by those who were victims of the NoW hacking has destroyed their flimsy defence.

Against this background, News International/News Corp's bid to take 100% control of broadcaster BSKyB is being considered by the Con-Dem government. While the Tories in particular clearly want the takeover to go ahead, they are under huge pressure to refer it to the Competition Commission. News International is furiously lobbying to try and prevent this from happening.

The close relationship between the Tory leadership and News International was further underlined by the revelation that David Cameron met James Murdoch, the Europe and Asia chairman of News Corp, for dinner over Christmas at the home of the News International chief executive, Rebekah Brooks.

The dinner took place days after Cameron stripped Vince Cable of his powers over media takeovers and handed them to culture secretary Jeremy Hunt who will decide whether to allow the takeover to go ahead.

Further calls have been made to investigate the role of the Metropolitan Police who ignored a mass of evidence that thousands of people had been hacked by the private investigator working for NoW.

All of these murky events require a full, open and completely transparent inquiry into the actions of the NoW and News International.



Master of the 'dark arts' - Andy Coulson.

It should include investigating the role of the Met Police, the Crown Prosecution Service and their connections with News International as well as the links between Murdoch and the political establishment in Britain.

Such an inquiry should be made

up of elected representatives of the media trade unions, the workers' movement and the wider working class, including the anti-cuts movement. It's time the lid was lifted and a bright light shone on the actions of the rich elite who think they are untouchable.

Food price hikes fuelling unrest

FOOD PRICE rises have caused mass protests in Algeria, Mozambique and Yemen, as well as being a major factor in the movement that recently toppled the Tunisian dictator, president Ben Ali (see page 9). High food prices were also the spark that lit the 1789 French and the February 1917 Russian revolutions.

Naomi Byron

World wheat and maize prices have risen 57%, rice 45% and sugar 55% over the last six months. Food prices have risen by 21% in Egypt and 17% in India during the last year, where 100 million people participated in a general strike against food price hikes in September.

Recent government reports blame rising population for these price hikes, but the reality is the increasing use of agricultural land for biofuels, environmental disasters, protectionism, speculation and fundamentally a profit-motivated system, are the main factors pushing up food prices.

Floods have wiped out much of the harvest in Pakistan and badly affected late harvests in Australia, while droughts have done the same in Russia and Ukraine. Export restrictions on wheat introduced in Russia, Ukraine and other countries to attempt to protect domestic markets have led to rising global prices.

These price rises have then been increased even more by speculation. Hedge fund manager Mike Masters told the Guardian newspaper that "because there is already much more capital available in the world than hard

commodities, speculators can increase the price of consumable commodities, like foodstuffs or energy, much higher than traditional consumers and producers can react."

Biofuels use increasing amounts of land that would otherwise be used for growing food to produce ethanol, which is classified by many governments as more environmentally friendly than petrol.

Pascal Lamy, director-general of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) warns that "if current policies continue, by 2019 about 13% of the global production of coarse grains, 16% of vegetable oil and 35% of sugar cane will be used for ethanol [biofuels]."

There is more than enough food produced worldwide to feed everyone, the problem is that millions cannot afford the prices. Already one dictator has fallen, but to rein in food prices a much bigger change is needed.

While the food industry is controlled by private companies for profit and speculators control the prices, millions in the neocolonial world will still starve or suffer malnutrition.

In the West, undernourishment in poor families is increasing while, ironically, millions of others suffer health problems (such as obesity) due to highly processed, unhealthy but profitable foods.

The Socialist Party calls for food, like other production, to be democratically planned and controlled by workers and the poor in the interests of all. Once the capitalist profit motive has been removed it will be entirely possible to eradicate hunger.

Fight the Con-Dem 'bosses' charter

THE LATEST proposals for changes to employment legislation from the Con-Dems once again show their blatant class bias. These moves are supposedly about 'lifting red tape' and 'promoting job creation', but it looks more like 'promoting job destruction' and making it easier for bosses to throw workers out onto the dole queues!

Greg Maughan

The first part of what ministers are referring to as an 'Employers' Charter', proposes that the qualifying period before workers can lodge unfair dismissal cases be extended from one to two years and that a charge of up to £500 to lodge employment tribunal claims be introduced.

This will mean that bosses feel free to exploit and discriminate against

low-paid workers in particular, safe in the knowledge that they won't be able to afford justice.

The Telegraph quoted Harry Clarke of Cobalt Telephone Technologies: "On the day they are sacked, employees are asked to leave the Basingstoke-based business immediately and are rarely given formal warnings."

Clarke goes on to explain how his company premises have "a fairly large drawbridge and don't get lunatics turning up at the offices in the first place."

The company conducts 'personality tests' as part of its recruitment procedure, and for 'lunatic' you can read anyone who has been involved with a trade union and has a campaigning background, or even just expects the 'courtesy' of a notice period!

The Unite union has rightly condemned these proposals as a

'Rogues' Charter' and as part of the fight to defend all jobs and services, the trade union movement must vigorously oppose these regressive attacks and demand rights for all workers from day one on the job.

●David Cameron has also announced that the government plans to change strike ballot laws, making strikes illegal if less than 50% of union members take part. This move is designed to stymie trade union opposition to spending cuts.

The CBI bosses' organisation is further insisting that a strike ballot should only be valid if over 40% of those entitled to vote do so, instead of the current simple majority of those who vote.

If the CBI's formula was applied to voting in general elections then the present government would be illegal!

RMT leader slams anti-union laws

Alex Gordon, president of the RMT transport union, explained to delegates at the recent National Shop Stewards Committee how the anti-union laws were being used to frustrate industrial action by workers.

"A NEW JUDGEMENT in the High Court in London against my union [the RMT] has raised a new obstacle to workers lawfully engaging in collective industrial action. The case of Serco/Docklands Light Railway v RMT has highlighted yet again the inadequacy of the current strike laws and their ability to be 'interpreted' by judges in ways that were inconceivable a few years ago.

This week a judge found that the 'language' used by my union in notifying the employer of strike

action was unlawful. In particular he drew attention to the RMT's use of the word "audit" to describe the method by which it had arrived at a true and reliable record of its members on DLR who we called on to take industrial action after a 80% 'Yes' vote.

The judge said that "audit" implied an outside third party overseeing the membership records. Effectively this judgement puts us on the road to some sort of corporate state overseeing of union membership systems.

Even more worryingly the judge agreed to the employers' arguments that the union should allow the employer to have oversight of every single detail of correspondence and email between union representatives and officers that led up to the strike ballot.

The reason these judgements are appearing now is of course entirely connected with the massive fight that looms over public sector cuts."



Alex Gordon.

photo Paul Mattsson