

# Murdochgate scandal shows need for democratic and accountable media

**Philip Stott**  
Socialist Party Scotland

**“Y**ou must be the first mafia boss in history who didn't know he was running a criminal enterprise.”

With these words, Labour MP Tom Watson lacerated James Murdoch, chairman of News International (NI), during yet another parliamentary select committee inquiry into the activities of his media group.

Watson asked Murdoch if NI operated an “Omerta,” “a group of people who are bound together by secrecy who together pursue their group's business objectives with no regard for the law, using intimidation, corruption and general criminality.”

Watson's apt description was frowned upon by some sections of the media, including the Guardian. But the mafia reference will seem accurate to millions of people. The sight of a former News of the World (NoW) editor and the paper's top solicitor accusing James Murdoch of effectively lying, and vice versa, has all the hallmarks of a declining mafia enterprise indulging in a spate of blood-letting.

The most recent revelations include NoW hiring private investigators to follow, photograph and gather information on scores of people. This was taking place right up to July 2011 when the paper closed. Targets included lawyers of phone hacking victims, including those representing the family of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler. It also included MPs who were investigating the activities of NoW and News International. Reportedly trade union leaders were also victims.

Derek Webb, one of the private investigators who went public after NoW refused to pay a “loyalty bonus” to him, admitted following more than 100 people over eight years.

The scale of the corruption has also now engulfed other NI titles. A Sun journalist was arrested in November as a result of an investigation into illegal payments to the police.

## Police investigating police

There are currently four police investigations into the phone hacking scandal, email hacking and police corruption. Operations Weeting, Elvedon and Tutula are being conducted alongside Operation Rubi-

con, which is looking at phone hacking in Scotland and possible perjury during the Tommy Sheridan perjury case (see box).

The ruling class in Britain has a long history of using so-called public or judicial inquiries to divert or cover up the real crimes of its system.

Andy Hayman, who led the 2006 inquiry for the Met into NoW journalist Clive Goodman and NoW private investigator Glenn Mulcaire, now writes for the Times and other Murdoch papers.

Every group of workers that has taken action in defence of their jobs has been attacked by the Murdoch press

Hayman found there was no evidence that anyone other than Goodman was involved in phone hacking. This was despite police having seized 11,000 pages of notes in 2006 from Mulcaire that showed 5,795 hacking targets, including Milly Dowler's phone and families of victims of the London 7/7 attacks.

The Leveson inquiry, which started on 14 November, has now revealed that 27 other NI staff names, along with Goodman, were also handwritten in the margins of Mulcaire's notes.

As Labour MP Paul Farrelly, a member of the select committee that looked into the phone hacking scandal, commented: “Had Mr Hayman been in charge of the Watergate inquiry, President Nixon would have safely served a full term.”

The commissioner and deputy commissioner of the Met were forced to resign even before the most recent police investigations began.

The Met police has major questions to answer:

- After taking Mulcaire's documents, why did the Met hand incriminating evidence back to the NoW that clearly showed illegal activities had taken place? This included the infamous ‘For Neville’ email that proved NoW had hacked the phone of Professional Footballers' Association head Gordon Taylor.
- Why did the original investigation



At your service? The London Met have major questions to answer photos Paul Mattsson

## News International bosses cash in

Rebekah Brooks, leading NI executive and former editor of the Sun and NoW, was forced to resign in disgrace earlier this year when the Murdochgate scandal blew up.

Her pay-off included £1.7 million in cash, the use of a London office and a chauffeur-driven limousine.

This is in stark contrast to the way she summarily dismissed 200

NoW staff when the paper closed in July.

Despite the scandal, Rupert Murdoch, chief executive of News Corp (NI's parent company), pocketed \$33 million for 2010/11 including a \$12.5 million bonus.

James Murdoch turned down a \$6 million bonus and had to make do with a \$12 million annual salary instead.

into phone hacking by the police conclude that this evidence and thousands of other documents did not prove widespread illegal activity?

- Why, when the police were asked to review all the evidence again in 2009, did it take just eight hours to conclude there was nothing to justify new prosecutions?
  - Why did the Met sit for four years on evidence that the hacking of Milly Dowler's phone had indeed been carried out by Mulcaire?
- The Socialist Party and Socialist Party Scotland have consistently demanded a full and open public inquiry by elected and accountable representatives, including from the trade union and workers' movement, into this scandal.

## Ownership means control

Before NoW was forced to close as a result of mass public pressure, NI's four UK papers - the Sun, Times, SundayTimes and NoW - held a 37% share of all newspaper circulation.

BSkyB is already the biggest broadcaster, above the BBC and ITV, in terms of revenue - £5.9 billion in 2010 alone with profits of just under £1 billion. Murdoch's desire to win 100% control of BSkyB - News Corp already owns 39% - was ruined by the phone hacking scandal.

But it's not just News Corp that dominates the media industry. The concentration of media ownership is such that a mere ten corporations own 75% of UK media.

Alongside the concentration of media resources has been the slashing of costs, job losses and increased workloads on those journalists that

remain. The smashing of trade unions, led by NI, in the 1986-87 Wapping dispute also accelerated the decline of journalism in Britain.

A November 2011 poll for YouGov found only 38% of people in the UK trust newspapers to give them accurate information. The figure for the tabloids was less than 20%.

This emergence of “churnalism” rather than journalism was explained by Nick Davies in his book Flat Earth News. 60% of “quality-print stories consisted wholly or mainly of wire copy and/or PR [public relations] material”. Only 12% of stories were generated by reporters (based on a study by Cardiff University).

News Corp is a global media monster, a reactionary attack dog. Every group of workers that has taken action in defence of their jobs and working conditions has been attacked by the Murdoch press. Miners were “scum” and striking firefighters were labelled as “Saddam stooges”. Liverpool supporters, following the Hillsborough football disaster, were outrageously accused of urinating on the dead and stealing from the dying.

It is also certain that public sector workers on 30 November will face similar attacks of being ‘greedy’, ‘uncaring’, ‘leaving the vulnerable to fend for themselves’.

But even the Guardian and Independent, that pose as defenders of objectivity and can produce some devastating insights, ultimately defend the interests of capitalism.

It is useful for the capitalists to have so-called “objective” newspapers - which can then be turned full force against the working class

when it suits.

The Murdochgate scandal underlines the need for working class people, trade unionists and young people to have our own voice. Socialists strive to build workers' presses, websites and to use social media that promote the interests of workers and young people.

The Socialist Party also opposes a state monopoly of news and information that existed under Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe.

We stand for the nationalisation of the printing presses, television and radio to be run under democratic popular management and control, with facilities allocated to organisations and groups according to their popular support.

This would enable different views to be heard, and ensure an end to the scandalous abuse of power perpetrated by the billionaire media monsters.

## Socialism Today



The Socialist Party's magazine November 2011 issue, includes:

- **Preparing for the showdown** November 30 is potentially a momentous turning point, writes Peter Taaffe
- **Lost in Euroland** The Eurozone crisis deepens. An analysis by Robert Bechert
- **Refusing to accept sexism** Eleanor Donne looks at the Slutwalk protests, part of a movement of women fighting back

£2.50 including postage from Socialist Today PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD.

socialismtoday@socialistparty.org.uk  
www.socialismtoday.org  
020 8988 8773

## Tommy Sheridan perjury case

Another former NoW editor, Andy Coulson, is being investigated by Strathclyde police as part of a perjury investigation.

Coulson was NoW editor when Scottish socialist Tommy Sheridan won a defamation case against the paper in 2006. After that, the Scottish Crown Office spent millions of pounds in prosecuting Sheridan, who was charged with perjury.

Coulson, alongside former Scottish NoW editor Bob Bird and its chief reporter Douglas White, are under investigation after giving evidence during the Sheridan perjury trial. They variously denied in court knowing anything about phone hacking, payments to police officers and denied ordering the hacking of Sheridan's phone.

This is despite Tommy's mobile number, PIN number and home



Tommy Sheridan

address being found in Mulcaire's documents.

It remains to be seen if charges are brought against Coulson, who was David Cameron's communications director when he gave evidence in December 2010.

Sheridan, currently in Castle Huntly open prison, should be released immediately.