

Neville Thurlbeck

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Dear Mr Whittingdale,

I am in receipt of your letter of November 22 requesting that I submit written evidence on the matters I discussed in my Press Gazette article of November 16 and I am happy to oblige.

On July 8, 2009, my name became publicly linked to the Gordon Taylor privacy settlement and in a highly damaging way, to the interception of his voicemails.

This was due to the existence of the 'Transcript for Neville' email.

On the morning of Saturday, 11 July, 2009 the legal manager Tom Crone informed me that the editor Colin Myler was going to ask me to resign on the basis of this email and that a generous settlement offer would be on the table if I held out.

The meeting between Mr Myler, Mr Crone and myself, took place a few minutes later and lasted approximately one hour.

During the meeting, I provided them with a substantial amount of evidence which satisfied them that I was not the guilty party.

During my very limited two or three day involvement in the story, I informed them that I had been instructed by a news desk executive.

I asked if Mr Myler and Mr Crone had spoken to that news desk executive.

They informed me they had and that he had informed them he had not only no knowledge of any phone hacking, but had no knowledge of a Gordon Taylor investigation whatsoever.

During my time as news editor (2001-03), I had started an archive system for old news lists. As a point of fact, the news list is the list of the main stories of the week which the news editor supported by his deputy news editor and his team are working on. This news list is presented at each morning conference and is handed out and discussed with the top editorial team, presided over by the editor.

My former secretary was still on the news desk and I suspected she would still be diligently archiving them.

I directed Mr Myler and Mr Crone to the archive.

They found that the news desk executive who had denied any knowledge of the Gordon Taylor story, had in fact been billing it as the main story of the week on his news list. And he had been doing so for an entire week in 2005 in front of the then editor Andy Coulson.

I also provided Mr Myler and Mr Crone with email correspondence between myself and the news desk executive in which we discussed the Taylor story extensively.

I followed this up with a lengthy memo on Wednesday 15 July, 2009 and handed it to Mr Myler and Mr Crone.

I kept my job and was not subjected to any disciplinary action.

However, although the newsdesk executive in question was admonished for misleading and misinforming Mr Myler and Mr Crone he wasn't disciplined and kept his job.

On Sunday, 19 July, I was still focused on providing the company with as much information as possible surrounding the person responsible for and in charge of the Gordon Taylor story so that they could have complete peace of mind that the internal investigation into the matter was thorough, accurate and beyond repudiation.

With this in mind, I tracked down Ross Hall in Peru, the reporter who had made the transcript in the 'Transcript for Neville' email to try to discover who had handed him the tapes of the hacked voicemails and ordered him to transcribe them. This seemed to me to be an elementary and sensible first step in any investigation into the matter.

I taped the call and it exonerated me and incriminated the executive.

I immediately called Mr Crone to tell him this as it was final proof to News International, the police and Parliament, that I had not hacked Gordon Taylor's phone. Up to this point, I thought Mr Myler and Mr Crone were on a genuine mission to find the proof that their chief reporter was innocent.

He was unpleasant and extremely angry. He told me, "I have to go in front of the committee in a few days time and defend everybody. No I don't want the bloody tape."

It was at this point when I realised there was no such mission to find the proof of my innocence. This was because the only proof available would lead to the sacking and possible prosecution of another top

executive. This would fatally damage the “rogue reporter” defence which was being advanced at the time.

This is when it appears to me that Mr Myler and Mr Crone formulated their policy of leaving me to dangle as a suspect for the next two years. It wasn't ideal, but it was a more advantageous corporate strategy to have me as a suspect than one of their top executives as a convict.

Mr Myler and Mr Crone appeared before the Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee on Tuesday, 21 July, 2009, two days after I tracked down Ross.

They made no mention of Ross being tracked down and spoken to by me. Or of him volunteering information which vindicated me on the “Transcript for Neville” email matter and implicating another executive.

They were in possession of all this knowledge and they failed to disclose it to the committee.

In my intimate experience of the fall-out from the phone hacking scandal, there has been a pattern of News of the World executives withholding information from News International executives and to the CMS Committee.

During December 2010 and January 2011, I was provided, on a highly confidential basis, with information about the industrial scale of hacking at the News of the World.

On two occasions, I made an appointment to see Bill Akass, the managing editor. During these meetings, I informed him that I had information which had the potential for “catastrophic consequences” for the newspaper.

And that the information was so sensitive, I needed to discuss it with the editor and with Rebekah Brooks.

They failed twice to take me up on my offer. And I was denied access to Ms Brooks by Mr Akass.

By February, 2011, I had had enough. For the first time in my career, I failed to turn up to work and drove north to see my family.

I emailed Mr Myler that the hacking of Gordon Taylor's phone and the Max Mosley "blackmail letters" had long been known by the News of the World to have been the work of a certain executive, who I shall not name here for legal reasons. And yet they had failed to mount *any* defence of me.

His reply is very telling. It failed to correct this highly accusatory statement. He passed on his regards to my family and invited me to take off as much time as I needed, with his blessing.

In April 2011, I obtained further evidence of my innocence in the Gordon Taylor affair in a taped call to another executive. The tape also incriminated the executive who had been admonished earlier for lying to Mr Myler and Mr Crone.

I offered the tape to Mr Akass. He seemed to panic and refused to even take possession of it – even to simply hand it to the police.

I made a further request for Rebekah Brooks to be informed of these developments. Again, this was denied by Mr Akass.

It was of course, too late for the News of the World senior executives to pass my evidence up the line to Ms Brooks and James Murdoch. Much of the evidence had been in their possession for almost two years and some very harsh questions would have been asked of them. There

was therefore a united effort at the top of the News of the World to deny me access to senior News International executives.

And by December 2010 and January this year, the fear of their inertia and suppression of information being exposed to Mr Murdoch and Ms Brooks was so paralysing, they couldn't face hearing the information which I warned them would have "catastrophic consequences" for the paper.

The pattern of non-disclosure ultimately led to a critical state of paralysis at the very top of the News of the World. A condition which rendered News International ill-prepared to deal with the torrent of allegations this summer which had a catastrophic effect on the newspaper, all its employees, on News International, News Corporation and the Murdoch family themselves.

When a false allegation against me was drawn to the attention of News International this summer, they dismissed me without telling me what that allegation was, citing legal reasons.

However, the reason for my dismissal was later revealed to me by Scotland Yard and it is my profound belief that had News International not been deprived of my evidence by the News of the World executives, it would not have dismissed me as it shows I was plainly innocent of the alleged offence.

It is against this backdrop of persistent non-disclosure that I must view Mr Myler and Mr Crone's assertion that they disclosed the "Transcript for Neville" email to James Murdoch in 2008 - and Mr Murdoch's claim that they did not.

During my meeting with Tom Watson MP at my home in October, I informed him of all the above.

I also informed him that Mr Crone had explained to me that Mr Murdoch would have to see the email as this was the only reason for settling the Taylor litigation.

And I informed him that Mr Crone had told me after the meeting that he had discussed the email with James Murdoch and that we were settling with Taylor.

I have no way of telling if he did or did not.

If he did not and had failed to disclose this vital evidence to Mr Murdoch, he would have been highly unlikely to confess this to me.

Ultimately, I can only judge whether he did or not on the balance of probabilities and from previous behaviour patterns.

If Mr Murdoch had been told of the existence of the email, he would have asked questions of me. He didn't.

It is inconceivable to me that so soon after the Goodman/Mulcaire case which had rocked the company to its foundations, that he would not have initiated an internal inquiry. He didn't.

It is inconceivable to me that upon deciding to pay record damages for invasion of privacy based upon telephone hacking that he would not have discussed the implications for the company and shareholders with other members of the board, who would in turn have advised holding an internal inquiry. They didn't.

During the course of the internal debate on settling the Taylor case between Mr Myler, Mr Crone and Mr Murdoch, I would have expected an email trail which

referenced phone hacking as this was central to the claim. Apparently, there isn't.

After considering this, I am left trying to believe that, contrary to all previous and subsequent behaviour patterns, Mr Myler and Mr Crone decided on this occasion to bring to the attention of Mr Murdoch, evidence of a phone hacking culture in the News of the World.

It grieves me to say that I cannot.

It grieves me because I have known and respected Tom Crone for 20 years. I like him enormously. Colin Myler is also one of the most fair minded men I have worked for.

But their strategy – which I challenged on numerous occasions - was ill-conceived and had become irrevocably defined by the suppression of facts. And it caused me two and a half years of severe criticism in the press and in Parliament, my arrest, the loss of my job and contributed to the closure of the paper.

It is for this reason why I believe it is important for the CMS Committee to have my perspective on the events which destroyed so much and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

I have furnished Mr Watson with copies of most of the documentation which support my assertion of non-disclosure at the top of the News of the World. I understand he has handed this to the police. I have not done so.

The police seized the Ross Hall tape and several memos from myself to Mr Myler and Mr Crone from my home in April.

The remainder, together with all originals, are with my lawyers.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Neville Thurlbeck