

## Dear Mr. Murdoch

Kris King – July 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/07/dear-mr-murdoch/>

For the past few days, the news here in our rain-soaked island paradise has been dominated by one, particularly large, story. It's not a new story, in fact it's been around for a little while, but this week it managed to achieve a certain measure of grotesque commonality with the funeral-bound corpse of King Henry VIII. I'm thinking specifically of how, as we were all basking happily in yet another warm and sunny day, possibly commenting to one another about what a lovely day it was, it unpredictably, and unceremoniously, exploded, leaving everyone feeling very, very sick. It's a story that we can't even refer to as "the elephant in the room" any more because it's now "the enormous pile of elephant shit in the room" (the elephant having fled the scene in order to calm down, re-group, and work out who best to blame for the massive, festering pile of crap it left behind).

I'm talking, of course, about the News Of The World phone-hacking scandal, a story which would have required very high levels of commitment to remaining woefully ignorant for you to have missed (on the Ignorance Scale of 1 to "Sarah Palin" you'd have to be somewhere around "Peter Andre"). Given the thoroughly appalling nature of this story, the scope of it, and the possible impact it could have on the relationship between the media and, well, frankly pretty much everyone, it was a foregone conclusion as to what the subject of my post was going to be this week. If you live outside the UK, or under a veil of societal indifference and self-absorption, I suggest you check out the [BBC's Q&A](#) on the story to get more of an idea of what's been going on with this twisted and, as of this week, sickening tale.

When it was revealed that the newspaper had not only hacked the phone of murdered teenager [Milly Dowler](#), but had actually *deleted voicemail messages* to free up room for them to monitor new ones (potentially destroying evidence in the process, hampering the investigation, and giving false hope to Milly's family), and all this at a time when she was still known as "missing teenager Milly Dowler", the shit well and truly hit the fan. In the days that followed it emerged that the parents of murdered schoolgirls [Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman](#), the families of [victims of the 7/7 bombings](#), and even bereaved families of [military servicemen and women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan](#) were being contacted by police as to the likelihood that their phones had been hacked too.

NotW advertisers started pulling their accounts under massive pressure from the public; calls for News International CEO, and former NotW editor, Rebekah Brooks to resign were intensifying, as were the calls for prime minister David Cameron to answer questions regarding his relationship with the Murdoch empire in general, and Brooks in particular (he is close friends with the latter, and employed former NotW editor Andy Coulson as his communications director); demands for a full, public, *judicial* inquiry into the scandal were coming so thick and fast that they were impossible to ignore. With rumours circulating that Coulson was going to be arrested, News International decided that they had no other choice but to shut down the newspaper. Wait, what? No, I mean it, seriously ... what the *fuck*?

Closing down a 168-year old newspaper, resulting in the loss of 200 jobs, rather than firing Brooks and anyone else who might have actually been involved in either the phone-hacking or paying of police, seems, on the face of it, to make absolutely no sense whatsoever. It'd be like closing down an entire school because the headmaster got caught wanking in the bushes outside some random stranger's house and, as the children wander the streets looking for a new school, the headmaster carries on in his new role as education secretary. The thing is that it *does* make sense, if you start thinking like Rupert Murdoch (don't do it for too long, though, you'll want to kill yourself); this is an incredibly cold, cynical, and calculated business decision – the only kind the Dirty Digger understands.

First off, you can bet your life that the NotW will be swiftly reborn, most likely as "The Sunday Sun" (which it virtually was already anyway), and it'll just be a case of "same shit, different underpants". Murdoch is obviously hoping here that people's outrage at the recent scandal (not to mention all the previous ones), and any memories of the odious, wretched foulness the paper embodied will vanish

into the ether along with the name. Secondly, the title had become fatally toxic to advertisers in a very short period of time, and there was little chance of salvaging it without making some huge, expensive, and incredibly difficult changes (notably "cleaning house", starting with Brooks). Third, shutting it down so suddenly like this puts everyone on the back foot, and gives News International enough time to get in there with a shit-load of industrial shredders and start Enron-ing the place before the rozzers can get too close [with glorious serendipity, [this story](#) emerged a few hours after I wrote this line – Kris] ... I guarantee you there is **so** much more dirt yet to be unearthed.

For a start, there's the relationship between Andy Coulson and David Cameron. In his press conference yesterday, Cameron managed to throw Coulson under the bus while at the same time saying that he took full responsibility for hiring him as his communications director (despite having been warned by everyone, including Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger and [former deputy PM John Prescott](#), that it was a very bad idea). Cameron, like many people who find themselves thrashing about in a cess pit they helped to dig, clearly believes that saying "I take full responsibility" is enough to bring the matter to a swift end – he obviously doesn't realise that it means you take *ownership* of a problem and make it your job to resolve it. So what are you going to do about it, Dave? Considering he admitted to never having asked Coulson, even when he resigned, about payments to the police, I'm expecting every paint warehouse in Western Europe to shortly receive massive orders for white-wash in the run up to this inquiry.

Then, there's Rebekah Brooks (also known in some circles as "The Wicked Witch of Wapping"). As editor of the biggest-selling newspaper in Britain (one which has, over the years, specialised in prurient exposés of every filthy little detail of the private lives of the great and the good), the question arises ... what does she *know*? What hold does she have over Murdoch that he'd be willing to dump an *entire fucking newspaper*, and all of its staff, before he'd even think about firing her? It's also well known that she has a close relationship with the prime minister (David Cameron and his wife regularly dine with Brooks and her husband, for example) ... so what has she got on him? We know that MP Chris Bryant was outed as gay by the newspaper in what was clearly an act of revenge for Bryant having stood up to the NotW by leading the initial charge against them for phone-hacking. It's clear that Brooks is not only party to an awful lot of private information about a lot of important people, but that she is also a deeply vindictive and nasty little sod.

It's obvious that what we're dealing with here is a watershed moment in the history of media in this country, especially in terms of the relationship between press and government. Rupert Murdoch has often been seen as a king-maker in British politics, with every prime minister for the last 30 years having the full weight of the Murdoch press behind them prior to their election, and anyone who stands up to him likely to find themselves marginalised into obscurity. When you have such a big share of the media cake, you can dictate the opinions of a hell of a lot of people – many millions every day get *all* of their knowledge about the world, and the events that shape it, via Murdoch's newspapers and TV outlets. Even if he was entirely benign, it's inherently undemocratic, not to mention dangerous, for any one person to have that much influence over individual, and collective, opinions.

In 1992, he helped swing the general election for John Major and the Conservatives with a relentless bashing of Neil Kinnock and the Labour party; the famous front cover of The Sun, "If Kinnock wins, will the last person out of Britain please turn off the lights", and his support in general had, of course, absolutely *nothing* to do with Kinnock's desire to dismantle Murdoch's monopoly. The switch of allegiance to Labour in 1997 stunned many who thought Murdoch was a die-hard conservative, forgetting that Rupert's ultimate loyalty is to himself, and he will ally with whoever is going to further his agenda and get him what he wants. Tony Blair famously had a close relationship with Murdoch and, as the icon of New Labour, was ultimately more Tory than the Tories were anyway (only without the baggage of sleaze at that point). The failure to get a decisive victory for his boy Cameron (who promised he would de-fang Ofcom and start dismantling the BBC in exchange for Murdoch's support) in the 2010 election was due to Murdoch's having long ago made the mistake of writing off the Lib Dems as ever being remotely capable of throwing a spanner in the works.

Given the colourful history of the Murdoch press, it's probably fair to say that Brooks is very much made in his image, and maybe that's the point? Is she being protected because she's the star pupil? For many, she represents a reassuring continuity of the old Murdoch journalistic (I use that word wrongly) traditions of sensationalism over content, and using the bullshit "public interest" canard to justify every seedy practise they employ for sniffing around people's arseholes in the hope that a fresh, steaming story might be squeezed out of them. Her NotW campaign to "name and shame" paedophiles, for example, was classic Murdoch; take an emotive issue and use it to whip the nation

into a frenzy, consequences be damned. It doesn't matter that some of the information they printed was wrong, and innocent people were attacked as a result; it doesn't matter that publishing the whereabouts of sex offenders will result in baying mobs driving them underground so they eventually pop back up in towns where people don't know they're a paedo. But, at least **your** kids are safe now, and at least the NotW sold a shit load of papers in the process, eh?

It wouldn't be unreasonable (in fact it would be a gross understatement) to say, without hyperbole, that Rupert Murdoch, and by extension the media empire he has built, has done more damage to the once noble profession of print and broadcast journalism than anyone in history. The media is supposed to act as a watchdog for the public; they're supposed to report the news, keep us informed, and hold a watchful eye over our institutions, our corporations, and, in fact, our whole establishment to make sure that they behave themselves and that they are held to account. The trouble is that Murdoch doesn't want any of that, it doesn't interest him. He doesn't want to *watch* the establishment; he wants to **be** the establishment – for a start, there's a fuck-load more power and money in it.

So, rather than a fourth estate that lets us know whether or not the rich and powerful are up to no good, we get the systematic destruction of journalism, the debasing of standards, and the near annihilation of reasoned debate and public discourse. We get a press that panders to the worst aspects of our society and culture, feeding our fears and our bigotry to create an "us and them" mentality that divides us, rather than bringing us together. It's all false dichotomies, black and white, good and evil, "with us or against us", because it's so much easier to manage – there's no room for grey area, no scope for nuance or ambiguity because the press cannot allow their position to ever be questioned. A lazy press presents opinion, rather than facts, because opinion can't be proved wrong but, in order to stand up, it must deal in absolutes; it has to be "this is right" or "that is wrong", or the show's over – relativism introduces doubt that can undermine the foundation upon which the argument is built, fatally wounding the fake moral crusades these media outlets often embark upon.

The "campaigns" that many newspapers engage in might seem to the average reader to be public-spirited altruism but are, in reality, universally driven by self-interest and profit. An overwhelming section of the mainstream media (particularly the shit-streaked corner of the section that Murdoch inhabits) long ago dropped actual journalism because it was time-consuming and expensive; far better to *pretend* to be a public watchdog than actually going to the effort of being one. People choose a newspaper because they feel it speaks to them, represents them, and is ultimately on their side – what better way for a paper to do that than by being a crusader for their morals? "Sponging immigrants are coming to take your jobs (but don't worry 'cause we're on to them!)" is more likely to sell a newspaper than, "Actually, there are complex political, cultural, and socio-economic reasons for migration, and we need to look at it carefully rather than resort to knee-jerk xenophobia".

So instead of actually having to debate, or even, God-forbid, *think* about a complex issue, we settle for accepting that it's all as simple as the press paint it and allow *them* to set the agenda. We settle for the scaremongering, hypocrisy and outright lies that have helped shape our opinions on unions, immigrants, public servants, people on benefits, political protesters, and all manner of other groups who don't fit in with their anachronistic view of the world. We allow them to engender mistrust and hatred toward foreigners, gays, and people of colour, fostering tension and paranoia when they should be helping us to understand them better so that we might forge meaningful enduring relationships with our fellow human beings. They debase our lives, insult our intelligence, and dehumanise each and every one of us in the pursuit of profit and control, and they do so without shame or remorse.

Murdoch is not alone in all of this, but he has set the gutter-level standard to which so many other media outlets desire to stoop in the hope of achieving the same degree of success. The Sun, for example, has always been about tits and football, nothing more, and therefore it merely exploits the baser instincts of its core demographic – but where The Sun goes, papers like The Daily Star follow (including, it seems, into phone-hacking, with the offices of the Star having now been raided by police). In the US, the disgusting black hole of intellectual, moral, and cultural bankruptcy that is Fox News has set a tone of news reporting that can, at best, be described as screamingly right-wing, fervently nationalistic, and bordering on fascist propaganda, but it's a tone that other networks have desperately tried to imitate in a headlong chase for ratings at the expense of quality, decency, and even basic humanity. I mean, who else but News International would ever hire such repulsively vile individuals as Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, or even, hell's teeth, Glenn Beck?

For all its faults, I shall remain ever [proud of the BBC](#). It is both respected, and envied, the world

over for the quality of its TV and radio output, not to mention that its news outlets (whether it's the [BBC News website](#), the News 24 and BBC World TV channels, or its radio news) are regarded as the gold standard for impartiality and trustworthiness (thoroughly remarkable for a state-owned public broadcaster). Murdoch has long hated the BBC for many reasons, most notably because it represents a part of the British establishment that he seeks to replace, but also because he knows he'll never come within a million miles of matching the quality of its output, or the respect that it enjoys across the globe. The biggest thorn in his side, however, has got to be the fact that he can't own it and, therefore, he must do whatever he feels is necessary to destroy it.

So what now? Well, we need to keep the pressure on anyone and everyone who has the power to bring about massive change in the way our media is run. We need to keep the heat on Ofcom, the regulator who will decide whether News International are "fit and proper" people to hold a broadcast licence – culture secretary Jeremy Hunt has already demonstrated himself to be yet another coward before the might of Murdoch by approving his bid to own the 61% of BSkyB, the UK's largest commercial broadcaster, that he doesn't already possess. All cynicism aside, the closure of the NotW is starting to seem like part of deliberate ploy to smooth things over as regards the hacking scandal in order to help push the BSkyB deal through (especially as it's now coming out that the closure may have been planned *before* this week's revelations broke).

We need to call to account every MP who has ever had close relationships with media barons like Murdoch; it's dangerous for politicians to be that in-bed with a media who can influence so many people throughout the world. We need to, as John Finnemore suggested in his [brilliant piece on The Now Show](#) yesterday, not lose our focus, because this is a rare opportunity to make some serious changes to the way our press is run. We need to remind people that it's not just the NotW, or even News International, that have been conducting themselves in this way – page 9 of the [Information Commissioner's Office report](#) shows that the biggest offender is, in fact, The Daily Mail (self-righteous, moralising pricks behaving like immoral scum – go fucking figure).

Most importantly, we need to remember *our* role in all this. We need to stop reading their shit, for a start, and demand *proper* journalism. We need to stop supporting people who advertise with these fuckers; the internet campaign to flood the NotW advertisers with questions asking whether they were going to continue buying ad space in such a deplorable publication had a devastating effect – all but four pulled-out before the closure was announced). We need to encourage people like Hugh Grant – yes, Hugh fucking Grant – whose [piece in the New Statesmen](#) (in which he turned undercover investigator and secretly recorded an ex-NotW journalist admitting to all manner of phone-hackery shenanigans), and his [cracking appearance on Question Time](#) (where he proved to be the most well-informed and level-headed member of the panel) showed that if the dude from "Four Weddings and a Funeral" can make important changes, any one of us can bring wrongdoing to light and expose the guilty for what they are.

The title of this post comes from a song by former Queen drummer, Roger Taylor:

Dear Mr. Murdoch, what have you done?  
With your News Of The Screws, and your soaraway Sun?  
You've sharpened our hatred, and blunted our minds  
We're drowning in nipples, and bingo and sex crimes

It's time to reverse the damage ... it's time to sharpen our minds, blunt our hatred, and remind Mr. Murdoch that we choose our leaders, we set the agenda, and we won't have **anyone** telling us what to think – least of all a power-mad purveyor of divisive, racist, homophobic, sexist, criminal shit-rags that treat us like morons ... remind him by holding his feet to fire, and don't ever let go ...

It's time for the bubble of this king-maker's bloated, funeral-bound corpse to burst ...

