

No response received

Tom Watson MP



House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Mr James Murdoch
Chairman and Chief Executive (Europe & Asia)
News International
3 Thomas More Square
London
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8 January 2011

Dear Mr Murdoch,

Your company, News Group, suspended one of its most senior executives this week on suspicion of serious wrong-doing.

In suspending Ian Edmondson, News Group said that "the News of the World has a zero-tolerance approach to any wrong-doing".

This new policy is welcome. In light of it, you will doubtless want to revisit the High Court appearance of your Chief Reporter, Neville Thurlbeck, in the case of the invasion of Max Mosley's privacy. In which judgment, you will recall that the News of the World was found to have broken the law.

In Mr Justice Eadie's summing up, he considers whether Neville Thurlbeck had attempted to blackmail the women concerned into cooperating, against their will, with a News of the World "follow up" to its initial story on Max Mosley.

An entire section of Mr Justice Eadie's summing up is titled: "Mr Thurlbeck's behaviour following publication on 30 March 2008".

In it, the eminent judge first notes that Mr Thurlbeck's behaviour towards the women "would appear to contain a clear threat to the women involved... The threat was then reinforced the same day with a further email to women A and B".

Mr Justice Eadie then personally questioned News of the World Editor, Colin Myler, attempting to establish the extent of his complicity.

Of Mr Myler's replies, the judge concluded that:

"That is effectively a non-answer, from which it would appear that Mr Myler did not consider there was anything at all objectionable about Mr Thurbeck's approach to the two women, as he did not query it at any stage. This discloses a remarkable state of affairs".

Of Mr Thurbeck's evidence, Mr Justice Eadie concluded that:

"It seems that Mr Thurbeck genuinely did not see the point. Yet it is elementary that blackmail can be committed by the threat to do something which would not, in itself, be unlawful".

This was not a blackmail case and it was therefore not pertinent for Mr Justice Eadie to pursue that aspect further. Beyond concluding, as he did, that both the News of the World's Editor and its Chief Reporter were unreliable witnesses; that the News of the World's routine use of blackmail was a "remarkable state of affairs"; and, of course, that the News of the World had broken the law in invading Max Mosley's privacy.

But Mr Justice Eadie clearly and explicitly made a point of concluding that Neville Thurbeck had attempted blackmail, with the complicity of Clive Myler.

You will be aware that blackmail is a very serious and particularly unpleasant criminal offence.

In which case, and in light of the zero tolerance to wrong-doing you have lately trumpeted, and given that it would be reasonable to assume that you are made aware when your senior employees are adjudged to be blackmailers in the High Court, please can you tell me:

1. What action you now plan to take against Neville Thurbeck?
2. Why you did not suspend Neville Thurbeck as soon as Mr Justice Eadie published his judgment, given your zero tolerance approach to wrong-doing?
3. Why you did not report the matter to the police, given the serious nature of the criminal offences being committed by your employee, on your behalf?

In your statement on the suspension of Ian Edmondson, you say that he has been suspended pending the outcomes of internal and legal enquiries. In the case of Mr Thurbeck, you have had for two years the conclusion of a High Court judge that he uses blackmail on behalf of the News International.

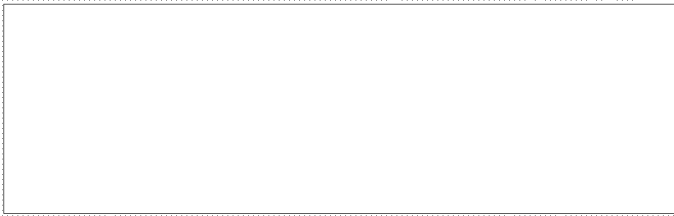
I know that you will not want your family business to be increasingly seen as a criminal enterprise besmirching the name of my country's democracy.

So I am sure I can count on your early reply and speedy action.

I am copying this letter to Keith Vaz MP, Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, in order that Mr Justice Eadie's conclusions can form part of his committee's enquiry into the Metropolitan Police's investigation of phone hacking by newspapers.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Tom Watson
Member of Parliament for West Bromwich East

Cc. Mr Keith Vaz MP, Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee