Day 86 am
Leveson Inquiry 14 June 2012

1 (10.00 am)

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Yes, Mr Jay.

MR JAY: Today's witness is the Right Honourable David Cameron, please.

MR DAVID WILLIAM DONALD CAMERON (sworn)

Questions by MR JAY

MR JAY: First of all, Mr Cameron, your full name, please?

A. David William Donald Cameron.

Q. Thank you. You've kindly provided us with a witness statement dated 4 May of this year. It extends to 84 pages and possesses three exhibits. Subject to one very minor matter, to which we will come in due course, is this the formal evidence you're tendering to our Inquiry?

A. It is.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Prime Minister, as I have said to many other witnesses, I am extremely grateful for the obvious work that you, no doubt with assistance, have put into your evidence and the material that you've provided for the Inquiry at a time when there have obviously been many other calls on your time. Thank you.

A. Pleasure.

MR JAY: Mr Cameron, may I start with two general questions about your career before 2001, which is the date you entered Parliament. You were special adviser at both the Treasury and the Home Office between 1992 and 1994; is that right?

A. That's right.

Q. In your dealings with third parties, to what extent, if ever, did you express an opinion which was not the opinion of your minister, without making it clear that it wasn't?

A. Well, it's quite a long time ago, so it's hard to remember all the interactions I had. Obviously as a special adviser, I would have had contacts with businesses, as you say, third parties. I mean, the job of a special adviser generally was to often be a mouthpiece for your minister, sometimes to be a bit of a sponge in terms of soaking up a lot of people that wanted to see the minister but the minister didn't have time, but on occasions I'm sure I would have made clear to people my own view about something, but I can't think of particular instances.

Q. On such occasions, do you think you would have made it clear to the third party that you were expressing your own opinion and not your minister's opinion?

A. I would hope so.

Q. And from your own experience, to what extent do you think was your approach orthodox or unorthodox?

A. I suppose fairly orthodox. When I became a special adviser, I'd been working at the Conservative research department at Conservative central office for a number of years, and my job as a special adviser was very much as a political special adviser. I was a speech writer, I was advising on party policy, doing the party political side of the minister's job, rather than being an expert special adviser.

In the Treasury, for instance, we had some expert special advisers who were tax specialists or economists, whereas I was more the general political adviser.

Q. Thank you. You were at Carlton Communications as we know between 1994 and 2001. We're plainly in the realm of broadcast communications and not print media specifically. You tell us about how those experiences influenced your thinking between paragraphs 61 and 66 of your statement, but am I right in deducing that it was your media background which at least in part brought you into contact with journalists, and it's that contact which has led to the development of friendships?

A. Well, there were various parts to my job at Carlton. One part was to deal with the regulatory environment that television and television companies faced, which was quite a controlled -- quite a strict regulatory environment. That was one part of the job. Another part of the job was dealing with investors and shareholders and the whole investor relations, which meant dealing with them, and another part was press handling and press relations.

So I formed some relationships with journalists during that period, but also probably in terms of political journalists I got to know, I would have said that was more related to the time when I was a special adviser, because I was dealing with political journalists then and some of them are still around today.

Q. Thank you. To what extent has your background in these friendships provided you with knowledge and insights into how newspaper news desks function?

A. Well, some knowledge, but not -- you know, I've never worked in a newsroom, so some knowledge and understanding, but not as much as someone who's actually worked there. I would say my time at Carlton probably taught me more about the television industry, about how it was regulated, and maybe we'll come on to this, a lot of the views I formed about media, media policy, media regulation, the BBC -- Carlton was quite a formative period because I was working for a big part of the British broadcasting industry, ITV effectively, and
Q. Thank you. I'm going to divide your evidence up if I may into five general headings. The first heading is general perspectives on the development of media issues.  

May we look now, please, at paragraphs 13 and 14 of your statement. Page 04099.

A. Yes.

Q. You explain that the media is the instrument of communication and integral to the democratic process, though we are all agreed the contact between politicians and media is inevitable, necessary, not inherently unhealthy. Is that right?

A. Absolutely. It's not the only way we communicate with people, because obviously you have some direct forms of communication, particularly at election time, leaflets and the like, but it is a very big part of the way we communicate, so the relationships are important.

Q. Paragraph 14, you refer to background discussions. Is that intended to include off-the-record discussions?

A. Yes. Off-the-record discussions, but also discussions to try and -- for journalists to understand more about you, because you want to -- you want people to understand your motivations, to understand your character, your judgment, your views, and why you hold them. So these conversations are important and that's why the relationship is important.

Q. In paragraph 15, you make it clear that a lot depends on building the trust of individual journalists. How easy or difficult has that been for you?

A. Well, it varies completely with the person concerned. So sometimes you strike up a good and strong relationship, sometimes you struggle.

Q. In paragraph 15, you also say: "The media plays a vital part in interpreting and explaining government announcements, policies and events to the public." In your view, and putting broadcasters to one side, has the press discharged those obligations accurately and fairly over the last 11 years, being the current ambit of your political career?

A. I think it's changed a lot. I mean asking politicians whether they're happy with the way the media report the news as we see it is, you know, it's a bit like asking farmers about the weather. We're always going to complain. I think a lot of the evidence that's been put forward in the sessions you've had where people have talked about the growth of the 24-hour news culture, the fact that things move so fast means that I think newspapers have been put in a difficult position, because the news has been made and reported long before they reach their deadlines and they publish their papers the next day, so I think newspapers have moved more towards trying to find impact, trying to find an angle on a story, rather than, as would have been the case before 24-hour news and all the rest of it, of just reporting what happened the day before.

So I think there has been a change, but I think that's quite a lot to do with technology and the development of media rather than anything else.

Q. But a change for the better, for the worse or in the end neutral?

A. I think from the politicians' point of view, and particularly perhaps from the government's point of view, it's sometimes a change for the worse, because if there's a big announcement, something we think is very important, that gets announced on the television, it gets picked over by the 24-hour news, and it's quite understandable that the newspapers, by the time they come out the next day, have to find something different, and I completely understand why they want to do that, but from the perspective of trying to explain to the country why you're making difficult decisions, why you're reforming the health service in this way, why you're trying to cut the deficit in that way, sometimes you'd love it if you could just try and get across more what it is you actually decided to do rather than an endless analysis of what the motives were or what the splits were or whatever, but politicians will always complain about this sort of thing, so I wouldn't put too much weight on it.

Q. Do you think --

A. Sorry, what it has leant me towards is spending quite a lot of the focus, and this is in my evidence, on broadcasting, and this partly goes back to my life at Carlton, when I formed a view that if you really want to get through to people, television is an incredibly powerful medium, and as the media markets are sort of broken down and newspapers are selling fewer copies and more people are looking at the Internet, yes, the audience for these big news programmes has fallen, but funnily enough their power in many ways has almost got greater, because the one thing lots of people do do all at the same time is watch the main news bulletins in the evening. So if you want to explain why you're doing what you're doing, if you want to get things across, television, as I try to explain here, is extraordinarily important and powerful, so it mustn't be left out of the mix.
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I suppose, on each party to the debate, as it were, having a sense of propriety as to what is right and where the boundaries are. Are we agreed about that?

A. Yes.

Q. The term a bit more distance could relate to the quantity of engagement, and you've told us about that, but it also could relate to the quality of individual engagements with journalists, are we agreed?

A. Yes.

Q. And are we also agreed that in that second sense we need, in Sir John Major's term, constructive tension, or certainly each party, each side having a proper understanding of what is appropriate and what may not be appropriate?

A. Yes.

Q. Is that so?

A. Yes.

Q. And do you feel in relation to the past, without alighting on individual examples, that in that second sense there may not have been sufficient distance?

A. Yes. I mean, that's part of my evidence, really, is to say I think this relationship has been going wrong for, you know -- it's never been perfect. There have always been problems and you can point to examples of Churchill putting Beaverbrook as a minister. There have been issues for years.

But I think in the last 20 years, I think the relationship has not been right. I think it has been too close, as I explain in my evidence, and I think we need to try and get it on a better footing.

Q. Thank you. In paragraph 20, you refer to the need to avoid excessive regulation, and I suppose defining the issue in that way, we all necessarily agree with that. The key principle you identify as being transparency. Is transparency sufficient, though?

A. No. I don't think it is. I think where transparency can help is -- in my evidence, I tried very hard to think carefully what are the risks when this relationship isn't right, and I tried to enumerate the risks, and some of the risks -- and one of them perhaps is the perception that media owners or editors or key figures in the media sort of wield too much power -- that risk I think you do mitigate in part by transparency, because if everyone can see how often you meet people, who you're meeting and the rest of it, that enables others to draw comment on your meetings, and I think we have a much better situation with transparency which this government has introduced, but clearly that's not enough because there are other risks and some of those other risks need effective regulation to deal with them.

I don't think the regulatory system that we have at the moment works, and so we need to improve it, and so if we just said transparency and that's it, everyone can see who's meeting whom, that's enough, I think that would be a mistake.

Q. We'll come to your ideas in due course, Mr Cameron.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Are you here talking about the relationship between the press and politicians or at a wider level? Because in relation to how politicians engage with the press, I would struggle a bit to see how regulation could assist. It's a cultural thing, it seems to me.

A. What I would say, sir, is the transparency can help address some of the problems of perception because people can see who you're meeting and when, but one of my arguments is that because the relationship hasn't been right, because it has been too close, as I put it, the politicians and the press haven't spent enough time discussing and sorting out the regulatory system under which the press exist.

We need to fix that, and I thought Ed Miliband put this quite well. He identified another risk, which is it's quite difficult for the politician to sort out on their own the regulatory situation the press face.
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<td><strong>A. You need to draw some boundaries, but it's very difficult to do because the politicians do have an interest in not being investigated vigorously.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Why does that consequence flow from the focus on media coverage?</strong></td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Yes.</td>
<td>A. I think because the press want access, politicians want coverage for what they're doing and their policies and their approach, and so the two parties focus on that, and when things were going wrong, as they clearly were, and I give the examples of the Information Commissioner's reports, what didn't happen was the politicians and the press didn't sort of disengage and say, &quot;Hold on a second, we have a real problem here, we need to deal with it, it might need changes to the law, it might need an improvement of the self-regulatory system&quot;, et cetera, et cetera, that didn't happen.</td>
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<td>9. <strong>Sorry.</strong></td>
<td>I thought Tony Blair's evidence to you was quite powerful. He said -- I'm not quoting -- &quot;I know there was a problem but it was an enormous challenge and I had all these other challenges to deal with and so I didn't deal with it&quot;, and I think that was a sort of encapsulation of my risk number one.</td>
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<td>10. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: No, no, I understand the point. But it seems to me, if I just go back to the politician relationship with the press, it's absolutely critical and part of our democracy, I entirely understand that, and as I've said to a number of people, one can't interfere with human beings being friendly with other human beings, but to some extent would you agree that the problem that the politicians face is that actually the onus is on them because the press will feel, perhaps legitimately, that they ought to push in order to be able to hold politicians to account, to investigate what they want to investigate, and the more ways they can get information the better, therefore it's up to the politicians actually to say, &quot;This dynamic needs to be changed&quot;?</td>
<td>Q. In relation to Operation Motorman, you say at the end of the paragraph: &quot;I regret that opposition front bench politicians failed to devote enough time to scrutinise the government and hold them to account.&quot;</td>
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<td>22. MR JAY: Mr Cameron, some of the risks, you introduce these in paragraph 22 of your statement on page 04103. The first in paragraph 23: &quot;... because politicians can focus on media coverage there is a danger they do not devote enough time to considering the wider issues of how the media operates and potential instances of bad practices.&quot;</td>
<td>25. But did you devote any time to this issue?</td>
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<td>24. <strong>A. If we take the expenses scandal, it was deeply painful for politicians but it was absolutely right that it was revealed and I think it's -- you know, the free press we have in this country is a very important part of our democratic system. We shouldn't fetter them inappropriately, that would be completely wrong, and we need to have the politicians continually called to account by vigorous press campaigns.</strong></td>
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<td>That's why we need to get this relationship right. Transparency is part of it, how we make a regulatory system work is another, and I think we need to try and find a way for some independence to be brought to that, so hopefully press and politicians can say, &quot;Well, it may not be perfect in every way, but this is a fair set of ideas and we can put them in place.&quot;</td>
<td><strong>A. No, I think it's just a general reference to things that weren't right. When I was doing -- writing the evidence, I was trying to reflect on how I felt as -- I wasn't leader of the opposition then, but just generally, and I looked back at some of the evidence that had come out and thought, well, you know, Parliament was doing its job and the Select Committee was doing its job, but the party leaderships weren't picking up these issues in perhaps the way they should have done.</strong></td>
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<td>12. <strong>MR JAY:</strong> Mr Cameron, some of the risks, you introduce these in paragraph 22 of your statement on page 04103. The first in paragraph 23: &quot;... because politicians can focus on media coverage there is a danger they do not devote enough time to considering the wider issues of how the media operates and potential instances of bad practices.&quot;</td>
<td>Q. Before the House of Commons Liaison Committee when you appeared there in September of last year, you put the point explicitly that, and I paraphrase: an overly close relationship permitted regulation issues to be put on the back-burner.</td>
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1  Q.  Looking at it more broadly, can one put it in this way:
2    part of the problem may be that politicians have been
3    guilty of a form of appeasement.  They've permitted the
4    power of the press to consolidate and be exercised
5    unhindered, and that's happened really over
6    a generation?
7  A.  I don't like the word "appeasement".  I think that's
8    a bit too strong.  I think what's happened, as I said,
9    is politicians have been focused on getting their
10   message across rather than regulation.  I think there
11   have been some good examples of politicians on all sides
12   actually confronting and facing down very strong
13   campaigns that newspapers or others might have, so
14   I don't think politicians have always been guilty of
15   appeasing in that sense.
16   I use the example of identity cards or 42-day
17   detention, which I was vigorously opposed to, which some
18   parts of the press wanted.
19   But no, I think it's more than appeasement, it's
20   more about just not focusing on these regulatory issues
21   when they needed to be focused on.
22  Q.  Okay.  Related to that, is not the size of the voice in
23   part a manifestation of economic and commercial power?
24   In other words, we've allowed too much to accumulate in
25   the hands of a small number of individuals?

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<th>A.</th>
<th>I don’t, really, because I think it’s quite difficult -- look, in an ideal world it would be lovely if the front page of the newspaper was all the things that happened in the world yesterday and the comment was entirely separate and all the rest of it, but I think it’s quite impractical.</th>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON:</td>
<td>To some extent it plays into the point you were making earlier, that whereas 50 years ago, when there was little television and therefore somehow separate them.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I’ve been thinking about this because a lot of your witnesses have made this point, and I think it’s quite difficult to try and separate. So often a headline encapsulates both a fact but also an opinion, and I think it’s very clear in the press code that you’re not meant to mix news and comment, but it happens and I think it’s rather a forlorn hope to think you can somehow separate them.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: To some extent it plays into the point you were making earlier, that whereas 50 years ago, when there was little television and therefore people got their news very much from their daily newspaper and they would read the Parliamentary debate or they would read of a court case, that was how they learned the facts.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: It really plays into your point that because of the 24/7 news cycle, newspapers are now required much more to provide their own angle --</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Opinion and impact.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: -- I think was one of your words, and that means inevitably opinion.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I think that’s correct, and that’s why I’m sure other politicians would take this view, that of course we spend a lot of time interacting with newspapers and arguing with newspapers and trying to get our point across, but I think if you talk to any modern political party in Britain and you ask them, “What do you really spend your time on more than anything?” it’s actually the 6 o’clock news, the 10 o’clock news. The thing that’s still watched, okay not by 15 million people, but, I don’t know, 6 million people, all at once. That’s where -- it’s differently regulated so it’s not such a problem, but I think in terms of how much time do we spend with all these newspapers groups and the rest of it, a big big focus, particularly since I’ve been leading the Conservative Party, has been on television</td>
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<td>and I hope that comes across in what I say.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: It does mean that the argument about not being held to account doesn't really work when you are being held to account by broadcasting journalists all the time, without it being obvious that the way that they are regulated has impacted the way they treat you.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I think newspapers and television hold politicians to account in a different way because of the way news is put together. The newspapers do play a very important role in terms of accountability because they have, you know, investigative approaches and budgets and the rest of it, they can really go after stories, get to the details.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Yes, I wasn’t for a moment suggesting that wasn’t right.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: But it’s not immediately apparent that broadcasters don’t hold politicians to account. It seems that they do, and certainly the broadcasters from whom I have heard don’t recognise the suggestion that they fail in their duty to ask appropriate questions or probe appropriately, notwithstanding the strictures of the Ofcom regulatory regime.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I’m sure that’s right, but perhaps there are some things that newspapers have been able to do because they don’t have the impartiality guidelines.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Of course.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Things like the Stephen Lawrence campaign or other campaigns, which are more, for want of a better word, edgy. If you didn’t have that, I’ll -- yes.</td>
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<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I entirely agree.</td>
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<td>MR JAY: Can I just understand, Mr Cameron. Is your analysis on the fusion of news and comment point either there isn’t a problem so there’s no need for a solution, or there is a problem but there isn’t a solution?</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>There can be a problem in some cases, but, you know, we have to -- I don’t think it’s solvable, so I think we should not try and find some -- some of the answers people have come up with I don’t think are particularly credible.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>The issue may be one of culture, would you agree?</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes. I think with all these things, culture is fantastically important. We can write all the rules that we like and have all the training packages. Whether it’s for ministers’ or journalists’ behaviour, culture is massively important, and I think it’s important in every aspect of life.</td>
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Q. Thank you. Can we move forward to a point you make in paragraph 131, which links in with this. Page 04138.

Dealing with the issue of campaigns, which you've covered, you say in the last sentence that you've never traded or offered a position on policy in return for the support of any media outlet. Do you believe that others have?

A. I can't think of any particular examples.

Q. Okay. The fourth risk you identify is about lobbying, but we'll come back to that later on and move back, please, to paragraph 47 of your statement which we've covered in part. This is the recent history showing the relationship that came too close. I just want to try and identify since when approximately you believe that that phenomenon started to arise.

A. This is difficult. I would argue it's partly this growth of the 24-hour news agenda and therefore the different role of newspapers. I think that's had an impact because politicians have wanted to try and get their message across with newspapers taking, as I put, a more aggressive stance.

I think there's also some sort of history, which you've heard a lot of in the -- of, you know, the John Major government, when I was a special adviser, and it did have an absolutely wretched press and had a terrible time, and I think Labour, quite understandably, thought: well, if we get in, we have to be better organised, we have to be more efficient at communicating.

I think like all things in life, I think the pendulum swung too far the other way, and there was too much spinning and culture of daily news fighting and all the rest of it, and we need the pendulum to swing back a bit, while still being professional and able communicators, because you have to try and get your message across in a different world.

I'm not trying to blame the whole thing on New Labour, I think that would be wrong, but I think it's been a developing story. You have the Conservative government under John Major that knew there was a problem, had this Calcutt process, which came to nothing. The last-chance saloon as it were sort of sat forever. Then you had the arrival of New Labour and I think the combination of that with the 24-hour news agenda is what lies behind some of the problems.

Q. So the pendulum was swinging in the wrong direction, as it were, possibly from 1994, 1995, and was possibly in the wrong place until certainly July 2011, does that sound about right?

A. I think there have been various attempts along the way to grab hold of the pendulum and do something about it.
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I believe in that the people who were backing me didn't believe in.

Q. Is there also a risk that overly close personal relationships, by which I mean individual relationships between politicians and journalists, have allowed judgments to be clouded?

A. I think obviously you have to take care when you have personal friendships, but I think that can be done, and I like to think that I've done that.

Q. I'm still on the general perspectives, Mr Cameron. Can I ask you to comment, please, on the allied vices, if I can describe them as such, of manipulation of the media by politicians, favouritism and anonymous briefings. Have you seen evidence of these vices in your own party?

A. Yes. These things do happen and it's deeply regrettable. I think as long as there's been a press and politicians, these things happen. But it is very regrettable, it often makes running a political party more difficult, running a government more difficult. It's deeply destructive.

I think there are degrees of this. Of course, you know, some politicians have journalists they have personal friendships, but I think that can be done, and I like to think that I've done that.

Q. I'm still on the general perspectives, Mr Cameron. Can I ask you to comment, please, on the allied vices, if I can describe them as such, of manipulation of the media by politicians, favouritism and anonymous briefings. Have you seen evidence of these vices in your own party?

A. Yes. Yes, I think it is. I think it's very important. If you find out that these things have been happening, you need to condemn them properly and act properly. I think that is the case.

Q. Can I ask you to address Mr Brown's point that reporting is hyperbolic, it's sensationalised. He said the politicians don't simply make errors of judgment, their motives are always put into question. Do you associate yourself as a matter of generality with that point or not?

A. I think there are occasions when that can happen. As I've said, it links back to this thing about newspapers being under pressure to find something special and different and go for impact, and sometimes that can mean questioning motives.

So you do -- I don't want to make this sound like sort of politicians complaining about -- of course we should have a vigorous press and they should give us a good going over and they do and that's fine. Sometimes it is frustrating when you feel your motives are endlessly being questioned, and -- but, you know, there's bound to be a certain amount of that, but I think the way I put it is that the volume knob has sometimes just been turned really high in our press and I'm not sure sometimes that does anyone any favours.

Q. The volume knob is turned too high and a consequence of that is motive is always impugned, rather than if you turn it down lower and examine human nature as it is, usually as a result of an error of judgment mistakes are made, and not some venal or appalling motive. Is that the way you see --

A. There have been politicians with bad motives, and if a politician is discovering doing something for a bad -- you know, the press shouldn't hold off making that point. So that, I think, is all fair for the press to challenge that, but it's just sometimes it feels as if the volume knob is being turned up unnecessarily.

Q. May I move on now to the second area of your evidence, Mr Cameron. This is your own personal approach. We can start with paragraph 73 of your witness statement, which is on page 04118.

A. Yes.

Q. You explain the nature and frequency of your contact: "Such contact may include formal on-the-record interviews, informal background discussions and coincidental dialogue."
Q. Paragraph 74, no formal record of who initiated the contact although you believe in the majority of cases contact would be initiate by your staff; is that right?

A. Yes. We had -- becoming leader of the Conservative Party at the end of 2005, clearly we had a programme of wanting to get our message and policies and approach across, and that meant a proactive campaign of talking to journalists and whether it was regional newspapers, national newspapers, television stations, and I hope in the exhibit DC2, there's a fantastic set of -- it goes on for five years -- of meetings. I can't promise it's 100 per cent accurate because you're going back to paper-based diaries 2005 and the rest of it, but it's a pretty big list.

Q. Do you have a strategy at the beginning of each year where you map out who you should be seeing over the course of the year, or is it much more adventitious, in other words your staff decides on a weekly or monthly basis who you might see? In other words, there isn't a strategy that if News International is 36 per cent of the market, it follows that you should be seeing them 36 per cent of the time, if I can put it in that way?

A. Yes.

Q. But what about just encapsulating the gist in two or three sentences of what was discussed to add greater transparency. Would you favour that or not?

A. I think there are improvements we can make here. I think the idea that someone suggested of a sort of written note of every interaction with every editor, every broadcast -- I think that would be overly bureaucratic because most of the meetings are pretty similar. You're explaining why you're in favour of free schools and academies and how to get that message across, and why the policy's a good idea. You're explaining something that you've already published.

But where I think there is potential for improvement is in two areas. If it's obvious that this is a meeting where the proprietor or the broadcasting business or...
that needs to be registered.

The problem with all this is the more rules and codes we create, the more difficult it is to make sure in every instance that people abide by them. I don't want to create a system that doesn't work, that is permanently broken. That would actually sap the faith of the public in this whole area. But I think some modest additions to the Ministerial Code to deal with the two points I've made, I think that is something we could certainly look at.

Q. Paragraph 79, Mr Cameron. You identify a small number of journalists who are close friends of yours, not included in your lists, and you name them there.

A. Yes.

Q. It's inevitable, of course, that friendships would arise and these are friendships which have developed over the years; is that right?

A. That's right. And the reason for putting this in is it goes to the last point I made. The more we write these rules, the more danger there is that you're going to forget that you bumped into so-and-so or had a meeting with such and such, and then it comes out you didn't reveal that and then the public loses all the confidence they had in your new transparency regime. That's the purpose, I think, of -- these are people I see very regularly and I'm never going to remember to tell my office every time I see them.

Q. You say that sometimes informal assistance is provided with speeches. I suppose the main risk here, and I ask you to comment on it, is that you provide these journalists with scoops or stories or, put less formally, with editorial access or in the coverage that they give you. So of course I have had those conversations.

A. Not very often, because predominantly it's about, you know, what -- if you take over the five years of being leader of the opposition, most of the time it was about what I was trying to do with the Conservative Party, what policies were we cared about, what the government was getting wrong, why we'd do a better job. It was all those arguments. But obviously on occasion you'd say, "We'd love a bit more support from your paper."

Q. Sir John Major gave us some evidence about a conversation he says he had with Mr Rupert Murdoch in February of 1997 in which on his account he made it crystal clear which of your policies, on the one hand, they favour, and which they don't?

A. Of course, yes. A lot of these people have very strong views and so you have pretty robust debates about some things.

Q. So although the point may never have been explicitly made, wasn't it on occasion obvious to you what the conditions for their support amounted to?

A. I think one can overdo this. I think in the end a lot of these newspapers follow their readers' views. I felt what I was trying to do, and I say this in my evidence, I was trying to win back to the Conservative cause
### Page 45

- Newspapers that had been Conservative and had been won over by Tony Blair. So I wasn't asking them to sign up to a whole set of views that they thought were completely ridiculous, I was just trying to get them to return to the right cause, as it were.
- So -- and of course, you have very robust conversations about policy areas where you don't agree.

### Page 46

- I think that's my point, is that at the end of -- towards 1997, the Conservative government obviously had fallen massively out of favour. Sun readers were anyway switching to Labour, and their decision, while a big blow for the Conservatives, you can see a sort of natural -- that's what was happening.
- I think under my leadership of the Conservative Party, steadily Sun readers were coming over to the Conservative Party, and I felt in talking to a lot of Sun journalists that a lot of them were very keen for their newspaper to change its stance because they felt they were out of tune with their readers.
- I think one can override the whole -- also, I am not -- you know, no way does winning the support of this newspaper or that newspaper guarantee you an election.
- Victory. Their circulations are, if anything, getting smaller.

### Page 47

- Q. I think we can all agree that the point has been -- its importance has been overexaggerated, but there's still some degree of significance to be attached, in particular to the Sun's support.
- A. Of course.
- Q. Would you agree on that issue? Can I go back to 2005, Mr Cameron, when of course you started as leader of the opposition I think in December of that year, if my memory is right. Was your strategy then, as your then press secretary George Eustice has said, to create distance between yourself and Mr Murdoch?
- A. I wouldn't put it like that. I'd won the leadership of the Conservative Party without the support of I think any newspapers, frankly. I had a pretty rocky time with them during the leadership election, and I think I'd won the leadership basically through what I'd said at Conservative Party Conference and it was television that had helped me to get my message across.
- I wanted us to have a good relationship with newspapers. I knew we needed to win over more support, but to start with there were certainly some in my office who were very keen on trying to do things completely differently and communicate much more through the Internet and what have you. I would say I was more cautious about that, thinking we wanted to work very hard on television, we should do what we could with the newspapers, but I think that's the way it was.
- It wasn't quite sort of one set of circumstances after 2005 and then another set later on.
- Q. But Mr Eustice has said, and I invite you to comment on this:
  
  "When I was his press secretary, we pursued a strategy of quietly puncturing the arrogance of both editors and proprietors and raising the status of what I term real journalism."

### Page 48

- Is that a fair analysis in your view or not?
- A. I think parts of it are right, in that we did want to have this -- we didn't want to go down the same route as everything Labour had done. We did want to have a bit more distance, but if you look at the record of the sort of meetings I had was having and the rest of it, I was still, you know, flying off to meet proprietors and trying to win people over, so I don't think it totally squares up that there was one approach that was tried and failed and then another approach. There's slightly more elision between the two, my reflection on it.  
- Q. You also made a point that you wouldn't have flown halfway around the world, if I can put it in those terms, to speak at News Corporation's annual conference.
- Would that have been an accurate assessment of your thinking in 2005?
- A. I certainly wasn't invited, but I did -- I was checking the record actually for this, because I saw what -- George Eustice did a brilliant job working for me, I saw what he wrote. But looking at the record of the meetings I had and the amount of activity we were doing trying to win over and win support of newspapers including, I think, you know, actually flying off to meet the owners of the Telegraph, as I say, I don't think I would characterise it as one approach and then a different approach. I think there's slightly more similarity between the two.
- I think there's one other thing maybe to say, which was at the beginning of my leadership, a lot of what I was trying to do was make changes to the Conservative Party, to the policies of the party, the approach of the party. Not all of these were very popular with the Conservative press, so I had a difficulty in trying to make changes to the Conservative Party while at the same time convince the Conservative press I was doing the right thing.
- Q. But some have identified a change of tack, as it were, in around 2007, rightly or wrongly, and that flows from...
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1. A. Yes.

3. Q. That may have continued until about 2007. Is that a reasonable analysis or not?

9. A. Yes, I think it is. Some of that, as I say, was because I was making these changes to the Conservative Party, but also I think, progressively realise over 2006, 2007, that it's very difficult if you're running a political party and you're trying to win over the public, you're trying to create momentum, it's quite difficult if you don't have what I would call sort of the different bits of the Conservative family behind you. You need your MPs supporting you, your MEPs, your councillors, your members, and you also need those parts of the Conservative press that should be sort of getting behind you. And I had this situation where some quite Conservative parts of the press -- I just wasn't really getting much backing from them and I was -- frankly I think I was sort of struggling a bit to get the message across. So I think I've put in a lot of work already but maybe I'll put in some more work.

Q. Your exhibit DC2, Mr Cameron, which is under tab 3 of this bundle, this collects together the meetings you've had with media figures as leader of the opposition.

A. You're not putting it forward as a certificate in the sense that you can't guarantee that every single meeting is here and we understand that.

A. Yes.

Q. For what it's worth, over four years and five months of opposition, we've counted 1,404 entries, which equates to around 26 meetings or interviews per month, which is more than one every weekday. It's fair to say, though, in government there have been fewer. It works out at about 13 a month, so it's 50 per cent of the time you've lavished on this in opposition.

A. As I say, when I was elected, I did try to do less of this and try to have more of a distance, try to make sure -- because genuinely when you're in opposition, what are you doing? You're campaigning, you're drawing up policies, you're trying to convince people. In government, it is and should be different. You should be spending your time governing, not talking about governing, so I did try to create some more distance, but as I explained earlier I think it's very difficult because of these daily battles that you fight.

Number 10 with a new leader of the opposition, just to make them aware of some of the processes and practices that might assist them in the work that they do and avoiding any conflicts and the rest of it.

So that is something I -- perhaps we can write to your Inquiry about.

A. Yes. I think it's right that in government you're making real decisions rather than just policy ideas and campaigns, so it's more important that what you do is done properly. And that's why you have special advisers' codes, ministerial codes and all the rest of it. But I do think there is -- when you're leader of the opposition, and I did the job for five years, it's only in the last year you get the sort of Civil Service machine starting to talk to you about how you'd translate your structure and your processes into Number 10 Downing Street, and I think there could be a strength in -- I don't believe in having a sort of official opposition office, as it were, but I think there could be a strength in having earlier discussions between the Cabinet Secretary or the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, but also I did, I think, progressively realise over the period of time that wasn't appropriate by both or all main parties. --

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<th>Q.</th>
<th>A.</th>
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<td>In government in particular, although obviously you have a fuller day job, does the same point apply? Do you feel that media engagement less, true it is, in government than it has been in opposition, has intruded in policy formulation, leadership and governing?</td>
<td>It shouldn't, but it can. I think the way I've explained the 24-hour news agenda, when I arrived in Downing Street, I did think that the set-up was quite geared to 24-hour news. It felt too much like a newsroom, and that's what the press department should be like, but you have to try and create a structure and a private office and a set of arrangements where you can think, take decisions, prepare for decisions properly, structure your day so you're not permanently in a sort of news warfare mode, if I can put it that way.</td>
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<td>We see dinner here with Elisabeth Murdoch, Rebekah Wade and Matthew Freud.</td>
<td>We see dinner here with Elisabeth Murdoch, Rebekah Wade and Matthew Freud.</td>
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<td>What we did for this -- the short answer is it might not, because what we did for this was go back over the diaries for all the time I was leader of the opposition, try and work out whether we had missed anything out, but it doesn't always include -- I mean, for instance, at the weekend, my diary wouldn't cover my weekends necessarily, so there could be other meetings in there that I haven't identified. Going through some of our other participants' meetings, we found some that didn't tally with us and ours didn't -- we've been through and we've tried to reconcile as much as possible, but inevitably you have some where -- I think in government it's different because certainly in the office you have a diary, I think John Major explained this, a diary of what you're meant to do that day and then a diary of what actually happened that day. So the government ones in office I'm pretty confident about. The opposition ones was our best attempt, but it may have gaps.</td>
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<td>Mr Jay: Before we break, Mr Cameron, may I just alight on one item, please? 16 August 2008, which is page 04220.</td>
<td>Mr Jay: Before we break, Mr Cameron, may I just alight on one item, please? 16 August 2008, which is page 04220.</td>
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1. I think the dinner was everyone who was there, including the people listed in DC2, but I think Rupert Murdoch was there, yes.

2. Q. And then the Santorini visit at page 04220, can I just understand, whose idea was that?

3. A. I think it was Matthew Freud's idea. I think he phoned me about it. So I think it was his idea, yes.

4. Q. Did he have a discussion with Rebekah Wade about it, to your knowledge?

5. A. I don't know, no.

6. Q. Do you know why that visit came about or what its purpose was?

7. A. Well, from my point of view, it was just an opportunity to try to get to know Rupert Murdoch better. Obviously I was trying to win over his newspapers and put across my opinions, so for me it was just an opportunity to try and build that relationship.

8. It was quite a long way to go and all of that, but it seemed a good opportunity.

9. Q. So presumably there was an earlier conversation or there had been earlier conversations with Mr Freud as to the possibility of having this sort of meeting; is that correct?

10. A. My memory is it came together quite quickly. I seem to remember I was on some tour day around the country.

11. I got a call or a text from Matthew. I was just about to go off to Georgia, to visit Georgia at the time of the Russian invasion, and it just seemed like a possible opportunity to link up and -- but I seem to remember it all came together very quickly at the last minute, but I might have got it wrong.

12. Q. We know that Rebekah Wade was there, but did you have a conversation with her about this before you flew out or not?

13. A. I don't recall that, I'm afraid.

14. Q. In 2009, Mr Cameron, 3 May, you had lunch with James Murdoch. This is page 04225.

15. A. Yes.

16. Q. Would you think it's possible on that occasion that you discussed regulatory issues, including Ofcom and the BBC?

17. A. Well, I don't recall what was discussed directly at the lunch. I'm sure that over the years I've discussed some of those issues with James Murdoch. He has very strong views on them, I have very strong views, they're not really the same views, and I'm sure we would have had discussions about it. Perhaps particularly -- well, I think probably on both. I don't recall the specifics, but I'm sure we must have discussed our views.

18. Q. This was a few months before his MacTaggart lecture, which was delivered in late August 2009.

19. A. Mm.
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<td>Q. Did you have any discussions with him about the subject of that lecture, either before he gave it or afterwards?</td>
<td>A. Not particularly long. Might have been half an hour, 40 minutes. It was a drink and a catch-up, but it was -- he wanted to tell me that the Sun was going to support the Conservatives and he told me, I think, from my memory, that it was going to happen around the time of the Labour conference, and I remember obviously being pleased that the Conservative Party was going to get the Sun's support, and I think we had a conversation about other policy issues at the time. That's my memory of it.</td>
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<td>A. To my memory, no. I think these would have been -- you know, as I say, most of these meetings were really about me trying to promote Conservative policy, the Conservative approach and the rest of it, but sometimes, because I'm interested in media issues and have longstanding views on them, sometimes I'm sure we would have discussed them.</td>
<td>Q. Again, to alight on any particular occasion is possibly unfair, but do you think on that occasion the issue of support of the Sun for you and your party was discussed or not?</td>
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<td>Q. One can see the intensity of his feeling, if I can put it in those terms, from the text of the lecture itself.</td>
<td>A. I think so. That's my memory of it, yes. Perhaps not the precise timing, but I think they were probably still debating it, but I seem to remember there was sort of the hint it was going to be some time in Labour's conference.</td>
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<td>A. Yes.</td>
<td>Q. Did he identify which aspects of your policy constituted the reasons for his newspapers, or in particular the Sun, wanting to support your party?</td>
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<td>A. Yes. And there are lots of things of that nature I don't particularly agree with. I've always believed in a strong BBC funded by the licence fee. I think Ofcom does have an important role. I think as I put in my evidence Ofcom got overbloated and overbig and needed, like other quangos, to be reduced in scale, but both have an important role.</td>
<td>A. I think at the time a lot of the focus was on the economy, because obviously we were in the midst of all the economic difficulties and we were setting out very clearly that it was important for Britain to get on top of its debt and its deficit and all the rest of it, so</td>
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<td>A. Yes.</td>
<td>I do remember discussing economic issues, yes. I think that's right.</td>
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<td>Q. Again, to alight on any particular occasion is possibly unfair, but do you think on that occasion the issue of support of the Sun for you and your party was discussed or not?</td>
<td>Q. On that occasion, do you recall any mention being made by James Murdoch of your policies in relation to the BBC and Ofcom?</td>
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<td>A. I wouldn't -- I don't recall. By this stage obviously I was making arguments that Sun readers were coming over to the Conservatives and our approach was what the country needed and all the rest of it, but I don't remember the specifics of that conversation, no.</td>
<td>A. I don't recall that, and I think it unlikely. I think that this was -- he was very keen to tell me directly that the Sun was going to support the Conservatives, that he felt on the big economic judgment about what Britain needed we had the right argument, the government had the wrong argument, and my memory is that's what the conversation was about.</td>
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<td>Q. To be fair to you, so that we see the overall picture, I was making arguments that Sun readers were coming over to the Conservatives and our approach was what the country needed and all the rest of it, but I don't remember the specifics of that conversation, no.</td>
<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Yes, you said you had a conversation about other policy issues?</td>
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<td>A. Yes.</td>
<td>A. Yes, he has lots of enthusiasms that aren't about the media. He's particularly enthusiastic about defence. He takes the view we should have at least six aircraft carriers, I think at last count, rather than two, so he has lots of enthusiasms and I'm sure we discussed some of those, but the key -- my memory is, and it's difficult to recall all of these events, I definitely remember him saying the Sun was going to support the Conservative Party. I wouldn't forget that. I think he gave me a hint of the timing, and my memory is it was mostly about the big economic picture, because that was</td>
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<td>Q. Can I go to 10 September 2009. It's described as drinks with James Murdoch. That was at the George, wasn't it?</td>
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<td>A. Yes. This is the page -- are we still on 229?</td>
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<td>Q. It's 04228, actually.</td>
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<td>A. Yes.</td>
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<td>Q. The evidence has been that it was on that occasion that he told you that the Sun would support the Conservative Party. Do you remember that?</td>
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<td>A. Yes, I do remember that. That was -- I do remember him saying that. I remember the conversation -- well, some of the conversation we had, yes.</td>
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<td>Q. How long was the conversation, approximately?</td>
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MR JAY: This was within about two weeks of his MacTaggart lecture. Had you out of interest read his lecture before 10 September 2009?

A. No.

Q. Had the gist of it been drawn to your attention?

A. I read — after it was delivered I would have seen the press reports, but I don't remember reading the whole thing at the time. I've read it subsequently in preparation for all of this, but as I say, he had very strong views. Some of these views I didn't agree with, and on things like the BBC, you know, we had a very clear position which dates right back to my time at Carlton, that the BBC is the cornerstone of British broadcasting, you need to have a licence fee, and as I say, Ofcom, while bloated, it had an important role.

Q. But just some might say that Ofcom and the BBC were the bête noire of Mr James Murdoch, he'd expressed himself very forcibly in the lecture, this is within two weeks of the lecture, it's more than plausible that he might have unburdened himself about those matters to you on this one occasion. Do you think that might have happened?

A. I don't think so, because, as I say, I think the main -- you know, this was sort of -- I think for the Sun it was the key issue of the day.

Q. It seems at least plausible again that that sort of point was discussed on this occasion. Would you agree?

A. As I say, I recall the drink, I don't recall the dinner.

Q. Okay. The announcement I think was the evening of 28 September, or it might have been the 29th, it's not going to matter for our purposes today. If you look at 04229, there are then a series of interactions with the Sun. An interview, George Passcoe-Watson, 1 October. Dinner, Dominic Mohan and Mr Passcoe-Watson again 5 October. Interview with the Sun, 5 October.

A. I would just, for anyone who's not on page 4229, point out there was also dinner with the Telegraph, meetings, interviews with Radio Manchester, Scottish television, the BBC, ITV. This was the party conference. This was an incredibly busy media week, where I was meeting all sorts of people from all sorts of different media organisations. I just want to make that point.

Q. Yes.

A. Including Lord Rothermere, the whole team at the Mail on Sunday, et cetera, et cetera.

Q. That's a very fair point, Mr Cameron. I didn't mean to occlude that one.

Page 65

a big change, and I remember it being about economic policy. That's my memory of it.

Q. Okay, 21 September, we can see from the bottom of the page there's dinner, you, James Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks. It's obviously a social occasion now. But can you remember anything about whether political issues, perhaps regulatory issues were discussed on that occasion?

A. I don't particularly recall what was discussed then, no.

Q. But the upcoming support of the Sun is likely to have been mentioned, isn't it?

A. Yes. I think I'm trying to remember the exact date of the Labour conference.

Q. I think we're onto about 27 or 28 September.

A. Right. I expect that would have been discussed. In terms of what the Sun was going to do, it was -- but I don't -- I remember the drink, I remember what he said about the Sun supporting the Conservatives. I don't particularly remember the dinner.

Q. Rightly or wrongly, the Sun had timed it for maximum political damage to Mr Brown's government, that goes without saying.

A. Yes.

Q. It seems at least plausible again that that sort of point was discussed on this occasion. Would you agree?

Page 66

Can we move forward to 15 December 2009, which is the bottom of 04231. That seems to be the first meeting you had with Rupert Murdoch after the Sun's support had changed. Can you remember anything about that conversation, particularly about the change of support?

A. Not particularly. I mean, in most of my lunches or breakfasts with Rupert Murdoch, the conversation has always been predominantly about economic issues, security geopolitical issues, he was very interested in what was happening in Afghanistan, very interested in global markets.

I think it's -- of course all businesses have their interests and the rest of it, but in my dealings with Rupert Murdoch, most of the conversation has been about big international political issues.

Q. The only other point on this schedule, it's quite a small point, we see you on 28 January 2010 at page 04232, there's dinner, Will Lewis of the Daily Telegraph, Frederic Michel, News Corporation, James Harding of the Times, Robert Peston obviously of the BBC. Was that the only occasion that you met with Mr Michel?

A. This is bottom of 4232?

Q. That's right.

A. This was in Davos and this is a dinner I've held pretty Page 67

Page 67

Can we move forward to 15 December 2009, which is

Q. Okay. The announcement I think was the evening of

A. As I say, I recall the drink, I don't recall the dinner.

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14 June 2012

Merrill Corporation
(+44) 207 404 1400
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8th Floor 165 Fleet Street
London EC4A 2DY
Day 86 am Leveson Inquiry 14 June 2012

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<td>Q. Can I ask you, moving away from this and towards someone else, Mr Aidan Barclay.</td>
<td>A. Yes.</td>
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<td>Q. We've heard some evidence from him and I hope you've had the chance to look at the transcript of his evidence under tab 27 of this bundle, but he referred to the fact that he had quite frequent text messages with you, you'd exchanged phone numbers. Indeed, we've seen evidence of some of those messages. It's the transcript for Day 62, in particular, it's in the afternoon, pages 83 to 87.</td>
<td>A. Yes.</td>
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<td>Q. We know from one text message, and some of these are of a personal nature, it's therefore not necessary to look at them, but there's one message at the start of tab 25, which is page PROP03106.</td>
<td>A. Right.</td>
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<td>A. No. I'd just make the point, I suppose, that again if you look at arrival on Downing Street, there are meetings with a lot of different newspapers and newspaper groups. But as you say, a less intense period. I had other important things to do. Page 69</td>
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<td>1. that you are almost bombarded with this sort of material, not necessarily from media sources but generally people trying to get you to look at things so at least consider them as part of policy formulation? A. I wouldn't say bombarded, but you have a lot of contacts with a lot of different people in different ways, so I've actually sort of slightly moved away from email in some ways, because I do my official papers and box and everything very formally, but I do get texts from business contacts, friends and what have you. Q. May I go back to the issue now of the Sun newspaper. We, I think, agree that it can't be seen as of massive importance, but it is of some importance -- A. Yes. Q. -- where it goes, as I suppose a form of floating voter, is that a reasonable characterisation? A. I think that's right. It certainly doesn't mean you're going to win the election, but you're trying to win support, build momentum, so it's that. Q. Did you develop a strategy as to how the Sun might be won over? A. I wouldn't put it like that, no. I think we developed a strategy of how to explain the values and the policies and the approaches we believed in and then tried to spread that as far as we could. Obviously when you're talking to the Sun, you want to talk to things -- those parts of your policy that are particularly going to appeal to Sun readers, so the freeze in the council tax we thought was particularly important because people were hard pressed, they're having a difficult time, that is something that people really can feel strongly about because they know the pressure their family finances are under. So obviously, you know, when you're talking to the Financial Times, you're going to be talking about Basle 3, but when you're talking to the Sun, you want to talk about the policies you have that directly appeal to their readers. Q. By this stage you of course had Mr Coulson on board, since May or June 2007, and -- I'll come to this in more detail later -- you had developed a friendship with Mrs Brooks, hadn't you? A. Yes. Q. And you were aware that Mr Rupert Murdoch had a good personal relationship with Mr Brown, were you? A. Yes. Q. And was it explained to you or did you work it out anyway that that was likely to be an impediment, if I can put it in those terms, to the Sun shifting sides? A. I think both that Rupert Murdoch had a strong relationship with Gordon Brown. I knew that we had our work cut out to win over the Sun, yes, but I felt what we had on our side was that Sun readers were leaving the government and coming towards us, and so I thought -- as I said right throughout, our task was to try to get what I see as a sort of centre right, pro-enterprise, pro-family, small &quot;c&quot; conservative paper back into the fold. Q. Was it your understanding that the final decision would be made by Rupert Murdoch, or at the very least it couldn't be made without his consent? A. I didn't know how these decisions -- I assumed obviously he would have a big say in it but I sensed that if we could show that Sun readers were moving in a Conservative direction, we would have a good chance of winning their support, but as I said, this was one of many things we were trying to do. Q. Did Mr Coulson give you advice as to how best to proceed in relation to the Sun? A. Well, of course. He was my Director of Communications and so he was in charge of taking our policies and working out the best way of promoting my leadership, our policies, our values, what we could do for the country, to all of these media outlets. Q. And you knew, of course, that he was very friendly with Mrs Brooks, didn't you? A. Yes. Q. And you said Mrs Brooks was close to Gordon Brown. Wouldn't be perhaps better to say that she was close to his wife, but in fact she was very friendly with Tony Blair and less well disposed to Gordon Brown, if I can summarise it in those terms? A. I think she was pretty friendly with all of them, and I remember some strong arguments when I would be berating the government and all its works and she would be standing up pretty vigorously for Gordon Brown. Q. When did you sense that Mrs Brooks would be disposed to supporting you and your party, approximately when? A. I can't really put a date on it. I think it was -- as I say, there was a growing picture of disenchantment with the government. The Conservative Party was, I think, getting its act together, looking more like a credible government, and it was a process. We had some strong allies, as it were. I don't want to ruin his career, but someone like Trevor Kavanagh on the Sun, I felt that he was someone who thought that the Labour government was getting it wrong, thought the Conservative Party was getting its act together. Lots of things he didn't agree with about what I was doing, but I always felt he was a potential ally for pointing</td>
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Q. I'm sure it's a process, not an event; in any event, if it is an event you're not going to remember the exact date, but approximately when do you think Mrs Brooks was onside? About six months before the shift of support? A year before?

Q. Not even a sense of when it might have been, in terms of -- I'm not asking you to give us a date, but was it months, was it weeks, was it years?

A. I don't want to get it wrong, so I -- it certainly wasn't weeks. It was I think more than that. But I can't really give you any more than that.

Q. Were you given any advice as to the importance of the times.

A. I think they were all important. I mean, I didn't quite understand. It was like -- the Sun likened it to the white smoke coming out after a papal election.

I didn't quite understand how the decision would be made, but my view was they were all important in terms of making that decision. The Sun readers trusted voices like Trevor Kavanagh, Rupert Murdoch, James Murdoch, Helen Macintyre, and others.

Q. It may not again be possible to identify a date, but you would have counted her or did you count her as a neighbour.

A. Yes.

Q. -- did you see her every weekend or most weekends in the period 2008, 2009?

A. Not every weekend.

Q. But most weekends?

A. In 2008, 2009? I'd have to check. I might be able to say, by phone, by weekly basis?

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1 Rebekah Wade, Dominic Mohan, all of them, and I felt I had to focus on showing how the Conservative Party would be good for the country, good for Sun readers, and we had a chance of as I say winning them back to the Conservative fold and that's what I focused on.

Q. How important were the Freuds in all of this, if not as decision-makers but as facilitators?

A. Very difficult. I mean, Matthew's politics I'm not quite sure about. So I'm not totally sure -- I don't want to -- I'm not totally sure what role he was playing, but he was being helpful in terms of trying to facilitate a meeting here or some advice or something like that. He's a friend, but I think politically he's supported various different sides at various different times.

Q. Okay. So Mrs Brooks, you make clear from your statement, is a friend.

A. Yes.

Q. It may not again be possible to identify a date, but amongst your good friends, say, by 2008?

A. Yes. We were -- you know, we got to know each other because of her role in the media, my role in politics, but we struck up a friendship. That friendship grew, even though she was at that stage still -- her paper was still supporting Gordon Brown and as I say she was still personally quite supportive of Gordon Brown and as I say our relationship got stronger when she married Charlie Brooks, who I've known for some time and who's a neighbour.

Q. She gave us some evidence as to the, if I can put it in this way, the quantity and tone of text messages. Can I ask you this straightforward question: do you agree in general with the gist of her evidence on that matter?

A. Yes, I think I do.

Q. And as for phone calls, I'm not asking you to count them up, but approximately how often would you or did you speak to her by phone, including by mobile phone?

A. In opposition, perhaps particularly sort of 2006, 2007, not a huge amount. I mean, I always felt when I did ring her, I always felt I was -- it felt like I was telephoning a lot less than Gordon Brown, which I thought was interesting, that he was the Prime Minister and I was the leader of the opposition.

My sense was I was in contact a lot less than he was. But I can't put numbers on it.

But certainly, you know, in 2006, 2007, not necessarily every week, I don't think.

Q. Can we move it forward to 2008, 2009. Was there contact by phone, say, on a weekly basis?
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<td>I don't think it's necessary to ask you to check, because these questions aren't designed to be that precise. It's just to get a feel.</td>
<td>Definitely we were -- particularly once she started going out with Charlie Brooks, living a couple of miles down the road, I was definitely seeing her more often because my sort of friendship with Charlie and as a neighbour and you know, we -- Charlie and I played tennis together and all sorts of other things, which I'm sure we'll come on to, so that was why I was seeing more of her.</td>
<td>There's one text message which I'm going to invite you to look at now. Before I do, I'm going to say something about it. It's dated 7 October 2009. I'm not sure what number it's been given in our system, but it's tab 35 of the addendum bundle which has been prepared.</td>
<td>But as always Sam was wonderful -- (and I thought it was) OE's that were charm personified! I am so rooting for you tomorrow not just as a proud friend but because professionally we're definitely in this together!</td>
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<td>Right.</td>
<td>I'm going to read it out, but before I do, I'm going to say something about it. Do you have it to hand?</td>
<td>The &quot;rooting for you tomorrow&quot; was obviously you were giving a speech probably at the party conference?</td>
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<td>Should make it clear before I read it out that News International have recently disclosed a number of other text messages between Mrs Brooks and Mr Cameron,</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Just the phrase &quot;but because professionally we're definitely in this together&quot;, was what your understanding of that?</td>
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<td>But it's certainly within eight or nine days or so of the shift of support. It was sent by Mrs Brooks to you, timed at 16.45 in the afternoon. The first line has been redacted because it's on grounds of relevance, and then she says: &quot;But seriously [which suggests that the first line contains or might contain something of a jocular nature] I do understand the issue with the Times. Let's discuss over country supper soon. On the party it was because I had asked a number of NI [that's obviously News International] people to Manchester post endorsement and they were disappointed not to see you.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>A.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>Q.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Okay. Can I move forward in time to May 2011 to deal with a discrete point. This relates to the McCanns.</td>
<td>Were you asked by Mrs Brooks to support or indeed cause to take place a review of the McCann case within the Metropolitan Police?</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I don't recall the exact provenance of this whole issue. What I remember is that I had a meeting with Kate and Gerry McCann as leader of the opposition, and anyone who's met them or obviously read about the story, you can't fail to be incredibly moved by what has happened to them and all the efforts they've made to try and get</td>
<td>I don't recall the exact provenance of this whole issue. What I remember is that I had a meeting with Kate and Gerry McCann as leader of the opposition, and anyone who's met them or obviously read about the story, you can't fail to be incredibly moved by what has happened to them and all the efforts they've made to try and get</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>But as always Sam was wonderful -- (and I thought it was) OE's that were charm personified! I am so rooting for you tomorrow not just as a proud friend but because professionally we're definitely in this together!</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The &quot;rooting for you tomorrow&quot; was obviously you were giving a speech probably at the party conference?</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>We're friends, but professionally, we as leader of the Conservative Party and her in newspapers, we were going to be pushing the same political agenda.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
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Madeleine back, and I followed this up as
Prime Minister, but I can't remember the exact
provenance of who called who and when, and what have
you, but I think it was -- the police clearly had played
a role in trying to keep the investigation going, and
the government has helped them with that.
Q. But in terms of any interaction between you and
Mrs Brooks, was it drawn to your attention that
Mrs Brooks went to see two of your special advisers,
I think on 11 May?
A. I don't recall. It might well have been. I don't
recall the exact conversations. I do recall, because
I can see what might lie behind the question, which is:
are you treating different investigations and campaigns
fairly? And I do remember actually, as Prime Minister,
consulting the Permanent Secretary at Number 10 about
the step that the police were about to take, backed by
the government, which was to provide some extra funding
for the investigation, and it was drawn to my attention
that there is a special Home Office procedure for
helping with particularly complex and expensive
investigations that's been used in various cases, and it
was going to be used in this case and he was satisfied
that that was -- that had been dealt with properly and
effectively. So it's an example, if you like, of the
importance of making sure these things are done properly
and I believe it was.
Q. But if I can put the point in this way, were you aware
of any pressure being put on you directly or indirectly
via Mrs Brooks to cause this review to take place?
A. Pressure? No, I wasn't aware of any pressure.
Q. Well, if it wasn't pressure, was any influence, then,
ought to be imposed?
A. Well, I mean clearly this was a very high-profile case,
and a case that a number of newspapers wanted to
champion because their readers wanted to champion it,
and obviously as government you have to think: are we
helping with this because there's media pressure or is
it genuine public pressure, is there a genuine case, are
we treating this fairly? And I did ask those questions
of the Permanent Secretary at Number 10, and so I think
we made an appropriate response. But I don't remember
any sort of specific pressure being put on me. I think
I'm right in saying the Home Secretary has given some
evidence on this as well.
Q. May I move on to a different topic. It is related to
earlier topics, but it sort of ties in with the implied
deal point. You may or may not have been following
Mr Gordon Brown's evidence, but he made a specific point
against you and your party, and therefore it's right

that you have the opportunity to deal with it.
A. Yes.
Q. He put it, to be fair to him, higher than implied deal.
He said that it was an express deal which you made with
either Rupert Murdoch or James Murdoch to, I paraphrase,
follow the line of MacTaggart: neuter Ofcom, trim back
the BBC, in exchange for News International supporting
your party. So that's the allegation. We'll look at
the detail, but I invite you first of all to respond to
it generally.
A. To respond generally, and frankly it is absolute
nonsense from start to finish. I think where it comes
from is obviously Gordon Brown was very angry and
disappointed that the Sun had deserted him, and as
a result, in my view, he has cooked up an entirely
specious and unjustified conspiracy theory to try and,
I don't know, justify his anger.
But I've taken the time to look through the
individual parts of policy that he points to, and in
almost every case it is complete nonsense.
Just to take a couple of examples, he makes the
point about the listing of sporting events and
particularly the Ashes, and actually it was the Labour
government, his government, that delisted the Ashes. He
makes a point about us taking a particular view on
product placement. Again, it was a Labour government
that started the process of changing the rules on
product placement under his oversight.
On the BBC, as I've argued before, my position on
the BBC is not the same as James Murdoch's position on
the BBC. I support the BBC, I support the licence fee.
So the Conservative Party, I think, will be
submitting a piece-by-piece response to this because it
is complete nonsense, but I'm very happy to go through
the individual parts. But, as I've said before, there
was no overt deal for support, there was no covert deal,
there were no nods and winks. There was a Conservative
politician, me, trying to win over newspapers, trying to
win over television, trying to win over proprietors, but
not trading policies for that support. And when you
look at the detail of this, as I say, it is complete
nonsense.
Q. Thank you. May we focus on two matters and sort of take
the highlights, because that's probably the sensible way
to deal with it. The highlights, if they can be so
described, are the Ofcom issue and the BBC issue.
A. Yes.
Q. It may be the easiest way to deal with this is to look
at paragraph 105 and following of your statement,
because you rightly say you've taken time to refer to

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<td>1. Relevant parts of iterations of your party's policy when in opposition. 2. I think we can look at paragraph 107, first of all, which is a speech the then Shadow Culture Minister Mr Vaizey gave January 2009, this is our page 04127. He said: 3. &quot;We were fans of the BBC.&quot; 4. On the next page: 5. &quot;While we support the licence fee and believe it's the best way to fund the BBC for the foreseeable future, we believe the level of the licence fee is at the top end of what is acceptable to the public.&quot; So hinting there that the fee may have to be frozen.</td>
<td>A. Yes, and that is what we did. We froze the licence fee, much to the anger of James Murdoch, who I think -- I think the Chancellor George Osborne thought that it should have been cut. So we had our own policy on the BBC licence fee which I think has been fair and reasonable to the BBC when other organisations have had their budgets cut by considerably more. So, again, this part of the conspiracy theory I think has absolutely no weight at all.</td>
<td>Q. Although some might say you were not prepared to go as far as Mr Murdoch to cut the fee, but you were prepared to meet him part way along the way, is that fair?</td>
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<td>1. A. I think it's quite difficult to argue, at a time when you know if you get into government you're going to have to make spending reductions, that you're going to see the BBC licence fee go up and up and up, and I think we had a consistent and long-term argument, which very much flowed from my own views formed at Carlton, that the BBC needed to be strong, it needed the backing of the licence fee. I do think the BBC had gone into areas it shouldn't have done, and I mention that in some of my evidence, but I think this is a fair settlement for the BBC and it's certainly not one that James Murdoch supported. 2. Q. In March 2009, this is clear from paragraph 109 at page 04130, you made an announcement which was to the effect that the licence fee would be frozen.</td>
<td>A. Mm-hm. 1. Q. Did that represent your policy then at all material times between March 2009 and the election, at least as regards the licence fee?</td>
<td>A. Yes. 1. Q. Can we look at Ofcom? You gave a speech on quangos, it wasn't devoted solely to Ofcom at all. It's paragraph 113, page 04132. 2. A. Yes. 3. Q. But you did make some points about Ofcom in two or three paragraphs, didn't you?</td>
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<td>1. A. Well, I made that announcement in March 2009 and we have delivered that -- we've delivered more than that policy in government, yes. By the way, it just caught my eye, paragraph 110. If there was this great conspiracy to hand over BBC policy to the Murdochs, it would seem to be quite a strange choice for Jeremy Hunt to launch a review of the creative industries -- this is paragraph 110 -- chaired by former BBC Director General Greg Dyke. If you wanted a sort of Murdoch conspiracy, you wouldn't ask Greg Dyke, a prominent previous Labour supporter and very successful Director General of the BBC, to carry out the policy for you. It's just another reason why I think this whole idea is --</td>
<td></td>
<td>23. (Pages 89 to 92)</td>
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<td>Day 86 am Leveson Inquiry 14 June 2012</td>
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<td>precursor of Ofcom, and also remembering the sort of</td>
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<td>levels of pay that there were in the ITC compared with</td>
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<td>Ofcom, and I did think Ofcom was quite a good example of</td>
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<td>a quango that had got too big, too expensive, and the</td>
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<td>pay levels were pretty excessive.</td>
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<td>I would just make the point -- I'll shut up in</td>
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<td>a second -- but at this time Ofcom was being actually</td>
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<td>roundly attacked on this basis by ITV, by the BBC, with</td>
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<td>which it had almost nothing to do, and also by</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>commentators on the left of politics like Andrew</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Rawnsley, who were all saying Ofcom seems to have got</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>too big and too bureaucratic.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>So this was an agenda that was very linked to my own</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>views, not in any way proposed or dictated by others.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Q. The upshot was that Ofcom, you said, would cease to</td>
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<td>exist as we know it, this is at the end of</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>paragraph 113:</td>
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<td>&quot;Its remit will be restricted to its narrow</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>technical enforcement roles [and that presumably covered</td>
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<td>roles under the Enterprise Act in relation to assessing</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>plurality] but it will no longer play a role in making</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>policy.&quot;</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Do you see that?</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>A. What our test was with all these quangos was to say that</td>
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<td>policymaking on the whole should be done by departments</td>
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<td>and be accountable to Parliament. We were making an</td>
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<td>argument about quangos that was not just about cutting</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>costs, it was about accountability. It was about saying</td>
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<td>that if policy is being made, that should be ministers</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>accountable to Parliament; if decisions that have to be</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>impartial, which is what Ofcom does, were their concern,</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>they should be carried out by independent</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>non-governmental bodies for all the reasons people would</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>understand. So it was a serious attempt to look at</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>quangos more broadly.</td>
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<td>Q. To take the story forward, as it were, is this right,</td>
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<td>that the reason this policy was not enacted was that in</td>
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<td>the pragmatic realities of the Coalition government it</td>
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<td>wasn't possible?</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>A. That's right. I wasn't involved in the detailed</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>negotiation of the Coalition agreement, but some</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>policies made it through, others didn't, and I suspect</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>this is one that we didn't get agreement on, but we have</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>taken action on pay levels in quangos and we have tried</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>to restrict them.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Q. You have denied that there was any implied deal. Can</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>I try and look at it in this way: do you feel, looking</td>
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<td>back at this, that there is nonetheless a perception</td>
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<td>that we had the coincidence of two things, at least in</td>
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<td>terms of time: a shift in support and policies which</td>
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<td>don't precisely match what we see in the MacTaggart</td>
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<td>lecture, but are not a million miles from them, and the</td>
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<td>public thinks or people think: well, there's some sort</td>
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<td>of link between the two. This is a perception and it</td>
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<td>flows from a cosy relationship? Do you accept at least</td>
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<td>that much?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>A. I think anyone reasonably looking at Conservative</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>policies and where they came from and why they existed</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>would see that they were driven by our values and our</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>approach and also my personal history with Carlton. So,</td>
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<td>no, I don't really accept that.</td>
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<td>I think there's a slight problem with this. If the</td>
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<td>argument goes there was no covert deal, okay, there was</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>no evidence for that, and maybe there was no overt deal,</td>
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<td>but nonetheless it all looks like there was a nod and</td>
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<td>a wink, we do slightly get into sort of witchcraft</td>
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<td>trials. How do you possibly prove that you're innocent</td>
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<td>on that basis?</td>
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<td>As I say, the best I can do is point to all of these</td>
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<td>policies, explain where they came from, and I think</td>
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<td>there's really good evidence that they were borne out of</td>
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<td>proper Conservative thinking about the media, and</td>
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<td>I think whether you're dealing with the BBC licence fee,</td>
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<td>TV advertising, Ofcom, product placement, whether or not</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>the Ashes should be on free-to-air television or not,</td>
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Day 86 am  Leveson Inquiry  14 June 2012

1 examples and the first one is Mr Andy Coulson.
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. You start that in your witness statement at paragraph 219, page 04168.
4 A. Right.
5 Q. In terms of your wish list in early 2007, Mr Cameron, were you looking for someone with tabloid experience?
6 A. Not necessarily, but I was looking for someone who was a big hitter, and I was looking for someone who could really cope with the huge media pressure that you’re under, and tabloid editors and leading executives on a tabloid newspaper I think do have — they bring something that others wouldn’t, and so there wasn’t a particular wish list, but it was trying to get the right person with the right skills.
7 Q. Because without generalising too much about tabloid editors, we’re tending to look at people who are tough and who are not going to blink under pressure, aren’t we?
8 A. I think that’s right. There is a reason for that, which is — I’m not asking for tea and sympathy, but when you’re running a political party, the media pressures, you know, a typical weekend, you might have — you have a policy problem over here, you have an MP expenses scandal over here, you have a marriage breakdown over there, you have some councillor enmeshed in some scandal over here. It literally comes in on top of your head.
9 It’s very fast, it’s very furious, and you need someone seriously good at handling it, and that to me was one of the key qualifications.
10 I had this very good guy, George Eustice, who was doing a good job. If I was going to bring someone in above him, I wanted somebody who really would be able to materially alter and improve the way we did things, particularly in the face of this massive pressure you face.
11 Q. To what extent were you looking at the example of Alastair Campbell as being obviously politically in a different place but the sort of man in terms of temperament and robustness who would be of assistance to you?
12 A. Not necessarily. I don’t think, you know, Alastair Campbell had — he was much more political than Andy Coulson, and I think in all sorts of ways there were occasions when clearly he’d overstepped the role of what he should have been doing.
13 Q. We’ve heard from Mr Osborne that a number of names were considered. Aside from the one broadcaster who has been mentioned, can you remember approximately how many names were considered?
14 A. There were two or three others. I don’t want to blight their careers by naming them. There were two or three other people we were looking at and one or two that I met with. But, as I say, we decided to employ Andy Coulson.
15 Q. Of the two or three others, were any from a broadsheet?
16 A. Yes.
17 Q. And Mr Coulson, was he the only one from News International or not, previously, of course?
18 A. No. I mean, this is difficult to — there was someone from a tabloid newspaper I think I’d talked to earlier in the process, but I can’t remember the exact dates, but at the time at which we made the Andy Coulson appointment, I think I’m right that he was the only tabloid editor available.
19 Q. The initial interviews, if that’s a correct description, were carried out by others, as we know, but how many did you see as part of this process? How many individuals?
20 A. How many people did I see? Obviously Guto Harri, who’s outed himself or been outed, I did have conversations with him. There was someone senior from a broadsheet newspaper. There was someone else very senior in the BBC. There was this tabloid journalist. This will obviously set an enormous guessing game going with our friends in the media. I’ve lost count. I think that’s four people.
21 There may have been others suggested. I think the situation was we had, as I say, in George Eustice a very effective communicator. Clearly we needed — we wanted though to strengthen the operation. People are being suggested and proposed all the time, but those four I can remember personally talking to.

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25 (Pages 97 to 100)
A. I don't think so. I mean, I -- the process was
George -- we'd both met him before. I'd met
Andy Coulson when he was editor of the News of the World. We'd both formed the impression that he was
a very effective individual. George met him after he
had resigned as editor of the News of the World. I then
met him -- there were the interviews with Ed Llewellyn.
I then met him subsequently and I made the decision to
employ him.
But again I asked for these assurances as well, just
to be clear. It's in my evidence.
Q. I'm going to come to that. But in your discussions with
Mrs Brooks, were you, as it were, seeking some sort of reference from her or was it far more informal?
A. I wasn't seeking a reference. I mean, when you're
employing someone like this who's been an editor of
a newspaper, you can't seek sort of formal references.
I'm sure I would have asked how effective he would be,
but this conversation may well have taken place after
I had made the decision. I can't recall exactly when
the conversation took place. But in the end it was my
decision. I was satisfied this was the right thing, to
have a former tabloid editor to help us with our media
and communications, and it was my decision.
Q. Sometimes discussions of this nature go into people's
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character and integrity. Do you think you had
a discussion along those lines with Mrs Brooks about
Mr Coulson?
A. I'm afraid I don't -- I don't recall. But I think the
most important thing I would have wanted to know is
would he be good at the job. I was convinced he would
be, because, as I said, it's the massive pressures you
face, you need someone with those sorts of skills, so
I'm sure that's what I would have been thinking of.
Q. And I'm sure effectiveness is going to be a key
attribute, but character and integrity might also be
relevant, might they not?
A. Yes, of course. You're going to be working with this
person incredibly closely. You have to have
a relationship of trust with them.
Q. What if anything was Mrs Brooks' reaction to the idea
that Mr Coulson be engaged? Was she very favourable or
not?
A. As far as I can remember, she thought it was a good
decision because she thought he was an effective
operator.
Q. Your evidence is that there was a meeting -- we think it
was probably in March 2007. If one ties that up with
Mr Coulson's evidence, he places the meeting as being in
your office in the Norman Shaw South building, which of
Page 103
course is the leader of the opposition's building.
A. Yes.
Q. That's paragraph 29 of his witness statement. Might
that be correct, that part of his evidence?
A. My recollection is that the meeting took place in my
office, and for me that was the key meeting about
deciding whether or not to employ him. I've been back
over the diaries and the records and it's difficult to
piece together everything, but that's my recollection,
that that was the sort of key meeting.
Q. And his evidence is also that there was a later
discussion, this time by telephone.
A. Yes.
Q. In late May of 2007. It's paragraph 31 of his
statement. And it was on that second occasion that you
raised the issue of phone hacking. Does that accord
with your recollection?
A. My recollection is that I raised the issue of phone
hacking and sought the assurance in the face-to-face
meeting we had in my office. That's my recollection.
I vaguely remember the further telephone call, but
that's -- I've obviously racked my brains to try and
remember exactly the sequencing, but my recollection is
that I knew it was very important that I needed to ask
him that question, and therefore did so, as it says in
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A. Yes.

Q. Which must have been the phone conversation in late May, and it's on that occasion where you state you asked him for assurances. Do you see that?

A. I do. I think -- 227:

"I then had a further conversation with Andy Coulson in which I asked him specifically about his involvement in the hacking case."

That is what I remember being the face-to-face meeting.

Q. Ah. He has them the other way around. Maybe we should see specifically his account.

A. Okay.

Q. My recollection is that he was on holiday in Cornwall and that you spoke by phone. This may be tab 58 of the second bundle. Yes, it's tab 58 of the second bundle.

A. Which paragraph is it? Do you know?

Q. Yes. It's paragraph 29 at page 02412. He says there that after the meeting with Mr Osborne, which he dates as taking place in March 2007, he says that he believes that you called him later that night and you'd like to meet.

A. Yes.

Q. "We did so, at some point soon after, at his Parliamentary office in the Norman Shaw South building and we had a discussion about the job."

And I've linked that one up with paragraph 223 of your witness statement.

A. Mm.

Q. Then there was a pause because there were local elections.

A. Yes.

Q. And then paragraph 31, 02413:

"The hiring process was completed in a phone conversation with Mr Cameron whilst I was on holiday in Cornwall. During that conversation I believe he told me that background security checks had been made. He also asked me about the Clive Goodman case."

That links up, I think, with your paragraph 227. So if that all was correct, it was only during the second conversation that the issue of the Goodman case was raised. Might that be correct?

A. That's not my recollection. My recollection is that the assurances I sought were in the face-to-face meeting, but it may be there was a further specific question I needed to ask in the phone call, I can't remember.

What I'm absolutely sure about is I remember the conversation with Ed Llewellyn was how important it was to seek the assurance, and I remember very clearly seeking that assurance and getting the assurance.

But, as I say, there do seem to be some differences, but they may well be compatible in the way that I've suggested. Anyway, I'm certain I sought the assurances, he's certain I sought the assurances, he just says it happened at a different time. The key thing is I asked for assurances, I got them, and that was the basis on which I employed him.

Q. Although to be fair to him, and -- well, we need to be fair to everyone, but paragraph 227 dates the assurance or links the assurance to the further conversation, doesn't it, Mr Cameron? That was your recollection when the witness statement was prepared, wasn't it?

A. Yes. But as I say, my recollection is that assurance was at this face-to-face meeting.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Mr Coulson actually seems to think there may have been further conversations with you, because if you go back to paragraph 30 of his statement, he says:

"Conversations/discussions stalled during the local election period towards the end of May. They were restarted and after further conversations with Mr Cameron, Francis Maude, Ed Llewellyn and Steve Hilton, I was offered the job ... the hiring process was completed in a phone conversation."

A. There may well have been more conversations because there are lots of different ways of describing a Director of Communications: are they campaigns and communications? Who are they managing? There were quite a lot of different potential -- they're all similar roles, but slightly different potential roles he could have fulfilled.

I don't see any fundamental inconsistency. We both agree I asked for assurances and got them, but the exact timing, I'm clear in my mind because I remember the conversation with Ed Llewellyn, I remember the importance of the interview, but, you know, that's my recollection.

MR JAY: When you accepted the assurances, did you assess there to be any risk?

A. What I assessed was that this was clearly
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| a controversial appointment, and controversial for two reasons. One was that bad things had happened at the News of the World while he was editor and he had resigned. So he had left his last job after resigning because of things that had happened. So that was obviously -- as I said in my evidence, I was giving him a second chance. The second reason it was -- there was controversy is this was a tabloid editor and there are some people who would say, you know, "Don't have a tabloid editor", to which my answer would be: it's a very tough job, dealing with the press for a major political party. You need someone who has the skills, who has the knowledge, who can really help you through what can be an absolute storm, and so I thought it was the right thing to do.

I just make one other point, which is -- because I recognise this is a controversial appointment, this has come back to haunt both him and me and I've said what I've said about 20/20 hindsight, but in doing the job as Director of Communications for the Conservative Party, and then Director of Communications in Downing Street, he did the job very effectively. There weren't any complaints about how he conducted himself. He ran a very effective team. He behaved in a very proper way.

Of course, if that wasn't the case, then I think well and actually he was someone who had, I think, a good code of behaviour in how he did his job.

Q. Well, this Inquiry has been looking at the culture, practices and ethics of the press, and tabloids, of course, have featured in that.

A. Yes.

Q. They are, some would say, associated with some of the worst aspects of the culture, practices and ethics of the press, so it might be said that was the risk you were taking, wasn't it?

A. As I say, I think the risks are the ones I've set out. Those were what I considered and I made my decision.

Q. On the first aspect -- you were talking about the controversial aspects of this -- of course he'd resigned in January 2007. Did you assess at all that there was a risk that the matter might, as it were, go further than Mr Goodman or not?

A. I asked for the undertaking about what he knew and he said that he had resigned because he did not know, and while -- obviously I have to be careful what I say, but these were undertakings that were given to the DCMS Select Committee, these were undertakings that were accepted by the police, that were accepted by the Press Complaints Commission, that were be given to a court in a perjury trial. They were undertakings that were

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| people would have an even stronger argument of saying, "Well, you took a risk, you employed this person and look what's happened." He did his job very well, and I think that is an important point to make.

Q. Okay, Mr Cameron. May I ask you about the risks associated with his being a tabloid editor. Could you be more precise about what those risks were. Did it amount to some people thinking tabloid editors might not be the most scrupulous people?

A. It wasn't so much that. I think it was -- you know, some people just don't -- didn't approve of what the News of the World had done or what tabloids do. I think it was more that.

Q. Which aspects of what tabloids do was in focus here?

A. Well, obviously, you know, quite aggressive articles sometimes. You know, you had -- when George Osborne was here, you had a story about him. You know, Andy Coulson probably came up with the most effective and destructive headline about me that anyone's managed, which was three words I never uttered, which was "Hug a hoodie".

The point I'm making is there were some people I think in the Conservative Party who would have said, "Don't have a tabloid editor". My view was that it was necessary to have someone tough and robust. I found in my dealings with him that actually he did his job very strongly enough for Gordon Brown to phone Andy Coulson shortly after he resigned and wish him well with his future.

So, yes, I accepted these undertakings but so did many other people and organisations who did a considerable amount to try and get to the bottom of this issue. I said in Parliament if I've been lied to, so has the CPS, the police, the DCMS select committee and all the rest of it.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: And, of course, we're not making a judgment one way or the other.

A. Of course.

MR JAY: But you obtained -- I have to be careful the way I put the question for all sorts of reasons, Mr Cameron, but there was no independent verification of the oral undertaking he gave you, was there?

A. Well, no, but, as I say, this issue had been investigated by others. So it was not just that I had an undertaking, it was others had had an undertaking, and if we look at the period as I'm sure we will coming up, it was an assurance that was then given again to the DCMS Select Committee, and they found and the police found and the CPS found that there wasn't the evidence that he knew what was happening.

Q. Why did you feel that he deserved a second chance?
A. Because I think I thought that he had done, as far as I could see it at the time, the honourable thing.

Something very bad had happened at the newspaper he was editing. He did not know, and he resigned. So I felt, given the assurances he gave me, that it was legitimate to give him a second chance.

Q. Is it your evidence that his News International background was irrelevant to his merits, as it were?

A. Well, obviously his knowledge of the industry, his contacts, his work as an editor were all important, but the most important thing was: is this person going to be good at doing the job of managing the press and communications for the Conservative Party? I wasn’t just after some -- any old person from News International or from the Daily Mail or from wherever. I wanted somebody really good who was going to be able to stand up to the pressure that we were under and would face in the run-up to an election campaign. That was the absolutely key consideration.

Q. I’m sure that the most important considerations were the ones you’ve identified, otherwise you would have been completely mad to have employed him, but I think the question was slightly more nuanced.

A. Right.

Q. Is it your evidence that his News International background was irrelevant to the decision, in other words it was a factor?

A. No, it wasn’t irrelevant, clearly. As I said, his contacts, his knowledge, his work at a newspaper, all of that mattered. But if what lies behind the question were after a News International executive because this was going to make it easier to win over the News of the World or whatever, no, that wasn’t the calculation. The calculation was: who is going to be good enough, tough enough, to deal with what is a very difficult job? And, as I say, something that he did extremely well.

Q. In paragraph 231, you talk about 20/20 hindsight. May I ask you this, though: do you now believe that you’ve made an error of judgment, in particular your judgment may have been clouded by the fact that Mr Coulson was close to News International and his recruitment was a major fillip to you?

A. No, I don’t -- my -- what I meant in the House of Commons, what I said then, was that look if I knew then all the things that would happen and all the consequences that would change, then that’s 20/20 hindsight. But I said in the House of Commons and I’ll say again today you don’t make decisions with 20/20 hindsight. I made the decision I made, I’ve set out the reasons why I made it, I will be held accountable for that decision, I don’t try and run away from it, I just try and explain why I made it.

Q. Move forward in time please to July 2009 --

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Just before you do, could I ask a question? You made a point about Mr Coulson, that he’d been responsible for a particular headline using words you’d never uttered, “Hug a hoodie”. I just wonder whether you felt that it was a concern that he could and was prepared to misrepresent a policy that you were concerned about?

A. I think it comes back to this fusing of news and comment, I suppose. I mean, the speech I made was quite a radical departure for a Conservative leader to say that we needed to understand why young people can go off the rails and we need to recognise that it’s not just you need tough punishment, but also you need strong families, you need respect in your community, and I said you need love, and to talk about love in that context, some right wing commentators thought, you know, that’s soft and whatever, and I think that’s nonsense. I think that’s incredibly important for young people.

So was it -- it was frustrating that he had come up with this headline that linked three words I hadn’t actually used, but can I really put my hand on my heart and say it was completely unfair and wrong? That’s what newspapers do. They make a point.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: All right.

A. They have a go. If you’re worried about headlines, don’t make speeches about love, I suppose is what I’d say. But anyway, it meant that one very good headline writer wouldn’t be writing any more headlines, he’d be working for me.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: All right.

MR JAY: July 2009 now, Mr Cameron. We’re moving forward to the Guardian piece and to paragraph 254 of your statement. I think it’s clear that you were aware of the Guardian article at the time; is that right?

A. Yes. I think so. I think I was probably more aware of this Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee that I referred to in paragraph 257, because that was obviously an event that was going to affect the running of my office and everything that was happening, and that I think was the most relevant, but obviously the two were linked, really.

Q. So the gist of what the Guardian article contained was drawn to your attention one way or the other, was it?

A. I’m sure it was, yes. I can’t -- yes, I’m sure it was.

Q. What was your reaction at the time to that which was contained in the Guardian article?

A. Throughout this process, the sort of test I set was: is
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<td><strong>there new information that shows that the undertakings I was given were wrong? I didn't see evidence that the undertakings I was given were wrong, and at this time Andy Coulson went in front of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and gave the assurance all over again that, as it says here: &quot;I never condoned the use of phone hacking, nor do I have any recollection of incidences where phone hacking took place.&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Of course, by July 2009, he'd been in post for at least two years, and you presumably felt that he had been an effective operator in your cause; is that correct?</strong></td>
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<td>Q. You also say in paragraph 257 that: &quot;Nevertheless in the light of these stories I asked Andy Coulson to repeat the assurances.&quot;</td>
<td>A. Absolutely. And not just that, but he'd done the job not just in an effective way, but he, as far as I could see, had done it in a way where he was trusted by the people that worked with him and he'd done the job in a proper way.</td>
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<td>A. Yes.</td>
<td>Q. And to be clear, the repetition of the assurance, was it sought in a face-to-face meeting, to the best of your recollection, or phone call or by some other means?</td>
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<td>Q. You must have been sufficiently concerned to do that, mustn't you?</td>
<td>A. To the best of my recollection, although it's very difficult to do the specifics on this, to the best of my recollection it was because of the impending Select Committee hearing, and I think -- obviously the embarrassment there was that he was being taken through a Select Committee hearing while he was working for me, and it was in that context that I think we had this discussion.</td>
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<td>A. Yes, absolutely. As I say, I think it was also linked to the DCMS Select Committee appearance because my memory of this is that he was going to make that appearance and I had a conversation with him about, well, when you make this appearance, presumably you will give the undertakings again that you gave to me. That was the nature of the conversation, as I recall it.</td>
<td>Q. I'm sure it was in that context, but just the means of communication.</td>
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<td>Q. Was there an inkling of doubt in your mind at that stage or not?</td>
<td>A. I don't recall.</td>
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<td>A. Well, given the assurances that I was given, that they were repeated to the Select Committee, and that the Select Committee found that there wasn't evidence that he knew, I thought it was right that he carried on working for me.</td>
<td>Q. Call him into your office, phone call, can you recall?</td>
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<td>Q. I'm not seeking to impugn in any way Mr Coulson's assurances, but you were reliant on his word and nothing much else, were you?</td>
<td>A. I don't recall. With your director of communications you're seeing every day, you're working with hand in glove, I don't remember the instance.</td>
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<td>A. No, I don't really accept that. Because I was reliant on his word, but as I say, I was also reliant on the fact that the Press Complaints Commission had accepted his word, the Select Committee had accepted his word, the police had accepted his word, the Crown Prosecution had accepted his word. So this was not just me accepting an assurance and blocking out anything that happened subsequently. It was a whole series of institutions taking that view, and as I say, the test I set -- because you have to try and get on with the job in hand -- was: look, if someone gives me evidence that he knew about phone hacking, I wouldn't have employed him and I would have fired him. But I didn't get that information so I didn't take that step.</td>
<td>Q. It's likely to be a face-to-face meeting, isn't it?</td>
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<td>Q. To be fair to Mr Coulson, I should say that paragraph 257 of your statement was not directly put by me to Mr Coulson, and therefore no inferences should be drawn from that part of his evidence.</td>
<td>A. Likely.</td>
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<td>Of course, by July 2009, he'd been in post for at least two years, and you presumably felt that he had been an effective operator in your cause; is that correct?</td>
<td>you're seeing every day, you're working with hand in glove, I don't remember the instance.</td>
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<td>Q. It's likely to be a face-to-face meeting, isn't it?</td>
<td>A. Likely.</td>
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<td>A. I don't recall.</td>
<td>MR JAY: I'm going to move on in time about nine months now to Downing Street, so maybe we can break before that happens.</td>
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<td>Q. Call him into your office, phone call, can you recall?</td>
<td>LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Nine months seems a sufficient break to allow us to have a break now. Very good. 2 o'clock, thank you very much, Prime Minister.</td>
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<td>(The luncheon adjournment)</td>
<td>(1.00 pm)</td>
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