

Alleged Russian Meddling and Fake News? Former UK Minister Indicates Brexit Referendum “Deal” Between Rupert Murdoch and David Cameron

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The campaign over alleged “Russian meddling” in Britain’s 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union (EU) has now rumbled on for months. With little substance, the claim is regularly made that the Leave vote was the result of the Putin government in Moscow planting “fake news” to achieve a desired political objective.

Such allegations are the British corollary of the campaign initiated by the Democrats and sections of the military-intelligence establishment in the United States, which also finds an echo throughout Europe. The aim is to justify both accelerating war preparations against Russia and massive state censorship of social media.

A remarkable admission by former Conservative justice secretary, Ken Clarke, to a government committee, raises far more substantive evidence of an insidious, pervasive and systematic effort to subvert the democratic process, also centred on Brexit, and involving wholesale manipulation of the news.

In contrast to the campaign against Russia, this has gone largely without comment because it concerns Clarke’s suggestion that former Tory leader David Cameron struck a “deal” with Rupert Murdoch in the run-up to the 2010 general election.

The former cabinet minister made his comments before the non-ministerial Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), part of an investigation into a proposed £11.7 billion takeover of the UK TV company Sky by Murdoch and his 21st Century Fox.

The deal would give Murdoch just under 20 percent of the TV news market and 45 percent of the radio audience in the UK, making him the largest competitor to the British Broadcasting Corporation. However, Murdoch’s reach is far more extensive, as he already controls the largest circulation share of any newspaper group in Britain—including the Sun, the Sun on Sunday, the Times and the Sunday Times.

The Fox/Sky move comes just five years after Murdoch’s now defunct News of the World was accused of criminality on an “industrial” scale, involving widespread phone hacking. Since then, it has settled at least 1,000 cases.

A key element in the rehabilitation of the Murdoch empire was the whitewash inquiry into press standards, led by Lord Leveson. Clarke noted in his interview—the transcript of which just became available—that the second part of the inquiry was never held because the

government was scared it would “upset Rupert.”

For more than a decade, and through three general elections, the oligarch had been a strident backer of Tony Blair and his New Labour government—so much so that Murdoch was described as an unofficial cabinet member.

This changed in the run-up to 2010. Clarke said “quite how” then Conservative Party leader Cameron had “got the *Sun*” away from Labour, “I shall never know.” Murdoch “would never let Tony down because Tony had backed the Iraq war,” he said, so “Maybe it was some sort of a deal. David would not tell me what it was. Suddenly we got the Murdoch empire on our side.”

Clarke said he assumed the appointment of Andy Coulson, former editor of *News of the World* between 2003 and 2007, as Cameron’s director of communications “was part of the deal.”

After the Tories’ surprise win in 2010, Clarke met with Rebekah Brooks, chief executive of Murdoch’s British arm, News International. Referring to Brooks’ law-and-order campaigns, Clarke said she “was instructing me on criminal justice policy... as I think she had instructed my predecessor...”

Brooks told Ken Clarke that she was “running the government now in partnership with David Cameron” and instructed him to buy “prison ships because she had got some more campaigns coming,” he relayed.

Coulson was forced to quit as Cameron’s communications director in January 2011, just before he was arrested, accused of conspiracy to intercept voicemails. In June 2014, he was found guilty. He served just five months of an 18-month sentence.

Brooks’ plea of incompetence—that she was unaware of the illegal activities of the newspaper she had edited for three years—was accepted. The following year, she was made CEO of News UK, the relaunched News International.

Clarke is not the first to suggest a deal. At the time of the 2010 election, Labour’s [Lord] Peter Mandelson said Murdoch had agreed a “contract” with Cameron. This was denounced as sour grapes by the Tories. Cameron categorically denied any agreement stating, “There was no overt deal for support, there was no covert deal, no nods and winks.” There was no “trading policies for that support.”

Clarke’s account of Brooks’ remarks suggest that the former prime minister perjured himself. At any rate, it is a matter of record that Cameron met with executives of Murdoch’s News Corp and its UK subsidiaries on more occasions than with all other media outlets combined over the same timeframe. Murdoch told a committee of MPs investigating the phone hacking scandal that he “often entered Downing Street by the back door.”

As the [World Socialist Web Site](#) commented following the conclusion of the Leveson Inquiry, successive Tory and Labour governments “bent their knee at Murdoch’s court,” as the media mogul exercised “close to veto power over state policy! Democracy is a façade behind which plutocrats and their political hirelings [operate as a law unto themselves.](#)”

Clarke's remarks confirm this appraisal. And not only prison ships are involved.

In 2004, Blair infamously made a sudden reversal on Labour's opposition to a referendum on EU membership. That year, the EU agreed to draw up a constitution. In response, the Tories forced a vote in parliament demanding a referendum to veto the move, which Labour opposed, and was lost. Murdoch's press ran with denunciations of Blair and Labour for "treachery."

Murdoch had long campaigned for a British exit from the EU, which he accused of imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on big business. His titles functioned as the main outlet for the euro-sceptic wing of the bourgeoisie.

Within weeks, Blair had changed his position. After a holiday, in which he returned home by way of Washington and New York, Blair announced he would support a referendum—to the astonishment of his cabinet, many of whom had not been informed.

According to reports, Blair's change of mind on a referendum came after a visit from *Sunday Times* columnist Irwin Stelzer, who informed him Murdoch's media would come out against him unless he did so.

Blair gave himself wriggle room, however, stating that the referendum should be held only after a constitution was agreed. In the end, referendums in the Netherlands and France vetoed the planned draft. The EU simply moved ahead regardless under the guise of the Lisbon Treaty.

In 2009, Cameron committed an incoming Conservative government to support a referendum. Having won office in 2010, with Murdoch's backing, he vacillated several times in implementing this pledge—not least because of concern at the possibility of a Leave vote—before officially committing in 2013 to hold a referendum by 2017.

The 2016 referendum vote narrowly went to Leave—heavily backed by Murdoch—and Cameron, who led the Remain campaign, was forced to quit as prime minister. He was replaced by Theresa May, also a Remain campaigner, but who leads a cabinet committed to Brexit.

Murdoch was one of the first people May met as prime minister, using a visit to New York in September 2016—where she was making her maiden speech to the United Nations—to hold a private audience with the oligarch.

It is suggested that it was Murdoch who instructed May to appoint arch-Brexiteer, Michael Gove, to her cabinet, despite him backing Boris Johnson against her in the post-referendum leadership contest. Gove returned in June.

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