

Statement of Neville Thurlbeck

In response to the numbered points set out in the letter from the Leveson Inquiry dated 23rd November 2011

(1) Who you are and a brief summary of your career history;

I began working for the Harrow Observer in 1986 as an indentured trainee reporter after completing six months full-time training at their Westminster Press training college. I was promoted to chief reporter while still a trainee, then to news editor of the sister paper, the Buckinghamshire Advertiser. Then to group features editor for all titles owned by Middlesex County Press. My final job in the regional press was as deputy news editor for the Western Mail in 1990.

I first started working for the News of the World in June, 1988 and worked for them in a freelance capacity until 1990. In 1990, I started working full-time for the Today newspaper and remained there until August 1994, when I was offered a job on the sister paper the News of the World as a senior news reporter. I was given the following titles over the years:

1996 Crime correspondent
1998 Chief crime reporter
2000 Investigations news editor
2001 News editor
2003-2011 Chief reporter

I won several awards and nominations.

They include:

2005

British Press Awards. Scoop of the Year. Winner

Also runner-up.

British Press Awards. Reporter of the Year. Nominated.

London Press Club Awards. Scoop of the Year. Nominated.

2004

Campaign Magazine Scoop of the Year. Winner.

2000

British Press Awards. Scoop of the Year. Winner

What the Papers Say Press Awards. Scoop of the Year. Winner.

London Press Club Awards. Scoop of the Year. Winner

Campaign Magazine Scoop of the Year. Winner.

1999

British Press Awards. Specialist Reporter of the Year. (For series of undercover crime investigations). Nominated.

1998

British Press Awards. Scoop of the Year. Nominated.

During my career on the News of the World, I was responsible for many undercover investigations which led to the jailing of criminals.

For example;

2001 A peer of the realm for perjury. Four years imprisonment.

1995 A drug dealer for distributing the class A drug phencyclidine (AKA PCP or 'angel dust'). Three years imprisonment for distributing a lethal type of recreational drug after an undercover investigation where I posed as a drug dealer.

2008 A husband for soliciting the murder of his wife. Five and a half years imprisonment for attempting to hire a hit man to kill

his wife after an undercover investigation where I posed as the hit man.

During my time reporting undercover, I assumed the role of a drug dealer, gun-runner and convicted killer, among other identities. I had to mix with many violent criminals on dozens of occasions. On most of these occasions, I was equipped with a hidden tape recorder and/or video camera and had this been discovered, my personal safety would have been in grave jeopardy. I was assaulted twice by thugs who suspected I was an undercover police officer but escaped serious injury by mounting an adequate self-defence.

My life was threatened several times after I had exposed serious criminal activity. In the late 1990s, I received a letter to my home threatening to burn my house down. News International took action to protect my family by installing body-guards at my home, building a fire-proof porch to the front of the house and installing CCTV at the front, back and side. This was the result of exposing a drug counsellor as a drug dealer.

Most threats came in the form of a telephone call.

I had a special pass which allowed me access to the secure News International car park at all times, even when the site was full, to prevent me having to walk to the HQ from a public car park.

In my 27-year career in journalism, I have never been successfully sued for libel. And I have no PCC adjudications against me.

(2) The Inquiry is well aware of your role in relation to the story published in the News of the World on 30th March 2008, 'FI Boss has Sick Nazi Orgy with Hookers'. Please comment on the following issues:-

- (i) The Inquiry has seen your witness statement filed in the High Court proceedings on 20th June 2008. Is there anything in this witness statement which you would now wish to correct or clarify?
- (ii) Did you instruct Woman E to try and get Mr Mosley to perform the 'Sieg Heil' salute, preferably within 2.5 to 3 metres of her hidden camera?

Answer: In his evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, Mr Mosley said: "(Mr Thurlbeck said), 'When you get to the Sieg Heil, get him to stand back about three metres so you get it all in shot'.

"It was very clear to me that Thurlbeck was trying to set the whole thing up from the beginning as a Nazi thing."

Mr Mosley misquoted me. What I said was, "When you want to get him doing the Sieg Heil it's about 2.5 to 3 metres away from him and then you'll get him in – no problem".

It is clear from this statement that the first mention of the word "get" is obviously shorthand for the verb "to video" or "to capture". My statement here is carrying the meaning of, "Should Mr Mosley give a Sieg Heil salute, in order to capture him on the video recorder, you need to be standing about 2.5 to 3 metres away or you won't get him in the shot." I explained this to Mr Justice Eady at the Royal Courts of Justice in 2008. It has since been twisted in the most tortuous fashion by those seeking to discredit the News of the World investigation into meaning I wanted Woman E to "get" Mr Mosley to do the Sieg Heil salute. A study of the precise wording of what I actually said shows this to be manifestly incorrect.

Mr Justice Eady concluded there was no evidence of a Nazi theme at the 'party'. And if there had been, there would have been a public interest defence for running the story.

All of us at the News of the World held the sincere belief that there was an abundance of evidence to illustrate a Nazi theme.

Mr Mosley's counsel suggested it was merely a "German theme" or a "prison theme".

I did not accept this at the time. And do not now. Apart from during the Nazi dominated Third Reich, I know of no German penal institutions in modern history where the inmates, wearing striped uniforms, have been subjected to lice inspections and beaten and then raped by the guards wearing German military uniform as they were at Mr Mosley's 'party'.

This still appears to me to have been heavily influenced by practices inside Nazi concentration camps. It would have been repulsive to the 100 million or so members of the organisation which elected him. And was a hideous insult to the Jewish community by sexualising their plight.

One of the girls referred to herself as "Aryan". This term is most commonly associated with Nazi racial theories and was used to define the Nazi ideal of the blonde haired paragon of perfection known as 'the master-race'.

The Guardian report of the High Court proceedings on July 7, 2008 stated:

"The courtroom and public viewing balcony was completely packed and gasps were audible as a woman, identified as Woman A and Mosley's main S&M contact, clearly said 'but we are the Aryan race, the blondes'."

I will always profoundly disagree with Mr Justice Eady's view that there was no Nazi theme. My view is that there was an abundance of evidence to support that there was.

Despite Mr Justice Eady's view, In October this year, the French courts appear to disagree with him. Although they accepted his privacy had been invaded, they ruled that I did not defame him thereby supporting the truth of the article.

(iii) Do you accept Mr Justice Eady's finding (paragraph 82 of the Judgment) that you threatened the women concerned that unless they co-operated with you, their identities would be revealed the following Sunday?

Answer: In the run-up to the publication of part I of the Max Mosley investigation, an executive was running the news desk in the absence of a more senior executive, who was on holiday.

When the news editor returned from holiday the following week, the Max Mosley story was regarded by the News of the World and

our rivals as one of our most powerful front page stories for many years.

As a result, the returning news editor was determined to improve on the work of his subordinate by delivering a more powerful part II.

He informed me that the only way he could do this was to ensure that the women who had taken part in the orgy gave us a first hand account of their involvement with Max Mosley.

This was a logical step.

The executive in question then dictated the email he wanted me to send the women.

I typed it out, put my name to it and sent it.

I did not provide this information to Mr Justice Eady as this was a privacy action and nothing would have been gained from arguing over who took the decision to send the email. The fact was, it was sent and I sent it.

The letter informs them of the options being considered by the news editor, not myself. The news editor was preparing to provide a story for the editor naming the women and revealing their identities. He was also offering them anonymity in return for their testimony which would provide an alternative and more detailed story for the editor. Some people have interpreted this as a threat. Others have interpreted this as offering them the protection of anonymity in return for providing a detailed account which would make for a more substantial article.

- (3) Do you have any comment you wish to make on the Bob and Sue Firth story, described in detail in Peter Burden's book, 'Fake Sheikhs and Royal Trappings', pages 105-119?

Answer: In 1998, there was an investigation by the Press Complaints Commission into the Firth's allegations. There was also an investigation by my newspaper's editor, deputy editor and managing editor into the Firth's allegations. Both investigations scrutinised the Firth's evidence. Both investigations exonerated me.

The PCC decided that there was no breach of the Code. It considered that the published details did not constitute an invasion of the complainants' privacy. It further considered that the subterfuge that I employed was justified and in the public interest and it did not believe that the use of any hidden recording equipment was a breach of clause 8 of the Code (relating to "bugging" devices).

- (4) We understand that you were dismissed from News International in September 2011, and commenced an employment tribunal claim against them. What reason was given by News International for your dismissal? Has any other person or body given you a reason for your dismissal? Why have you taken employment tribunal proceedings in respect of this dismissal?

Answer: I am unwilling to make any comment to the Leveson Inquiry on any matter concerning phone hacking as I do not wish to prejudice any future trial of any person who has been arrested or may be under investigation or may compromise Operation Weeting. During the questioning of Mr Paul McMullan, the Inquiry encouraged a deluge of highly damaging allegations which, some may argue, will make a fair trial of many of those on police bail, virtually impossible. I do not wish to be placed in that position and will respectfully decline to answer questions on phone hacking.

I have been approached by Scotland Yard and offered potential immunity from prosecution in return for giving evidence for the crown in any trial or trials resulting from Operation Weeting. I have declined this offer on the basis that I am confident that a thorough police investigation will fully exonerate me.

As this is my publicly declared position on giving evidence against my former colleagues in a court of law, it would be illogical for me to do so now at this Inquiry.

For similar reasons, although I do not expect to be involved in operations Tuleta and Elveden, I will respectfully decline to answer questions on these matters also.

(5) What stage have the employment proceedings reached?

Answer: Please see answer to question 4.

(6) Are you prepared to assist the Inquiry as to when you first saw the 'for Neville' email? If not, your privilege will be respected. If so, please provide as much detail as you feel able, including your reaction to it?

Answer: Please see answer to question 4.

(7) The fact that phone hacking took place at News of the World, and the fact that it was not limited to one single 'rogue reporter', is now in the public domain. Were you aware that phone hacking was taking place when you were at News of the World?

As far as you are aware, when did the phone hacking start at News of the World? When did it end? Again, please only answer these questions if you wish to?

Answer: Please see answer to question 4.

(8) The Inquiry also wishes to be informed about other aspects of the culture, practices and ethics at News of the World. Were you aware of the surveillance undertaken by Derek Webb? Did you ever instruct Derek Webb to carry out surveillance activities, and if yes, in relation to whom?

Answer: Derek Webb has been engaged by the majority of the reporters on the News of the World, including myself, to undertake what journalists on all newspapers have been doing for more than a century, namely to observe human behaviour and report on it. Mr Webb was employed because he happened to be better at this aspect of the job than most. Access to Mr Webb was controlled by the news desk. If information came to the office concerning illegal or disreputable behaviour by someone in the public eye, Mr Webb could be despatched to observe the individual to see if there was any evidence to support the allegation and upon finding any, to record it. A journalist would then be despatched to work alongside Mr Webb to write the story.

So far as I am aware, Mr Webb was not instructed to do anything illegal. He was certainly never instructed to do anything illegal by me. Nor to my knowledge, did he take it upon himself to undertake anything of an illegal nature.

- (9) Did you play any part in the surveillance of Charlotte Harris and Mark Lewis (i.e. by instructing Mr. Webb)? When did you first become aware that they had been placed under surveillance?

Answer: No I did not. I first became aware of it when I read about it in the press recently.

- (10) It has been claimed that News of the World 'tracked' mobile phones, i.e. were able to trace people by the location of their mobile phone. The Inquiry understands that this practice is also known as 'pinging'. Were you aware of such practices at News of the World? Can you describe to the Inquiry the extent of this practice?

Answer: I am not aware of this practice taking place at the News of the World.

- (11) Were you aware of 'blagging' practices at News of the World? (i.e. impersonation of another person in order to

obtain information). If yes, how widespread was this practice?

Answer: I was not aware of this practice taking place at the News of the World. I have since learned through press reports that it was a tool used by certain private investigators. However, they did not share this technique with me. I imagine this is because they thought it commercially valuable and preferred to keep their tactics to themselves.