



Star witnesses: Steve Coogan and Hugh Grant appearing before MPs investigating privacy and the press

allegations are always put to the other side.

The special advisers to this report? Dr Martin Moore and Steven Barnett, Professor of Communications at Westminster University. Moore, who had to apologise to the FCC for some of his claims about the MST 'research', founded Hacked Off. Barnett now sits on its board of directors.

So why did the BBC give such prominence to such an obscure report?

The answer may lie in the corporation's Business Editor, Robert Peston, an MST trustee, who was also on air that morning to deliver an unrelated business report.

THE MILLY BOMBSHELL 'THAT WASN'T TRUE'

IN July 2011, a nuclear bomb was dropped on Britain's newspaper industry. The Guardian alleged that the News of the World had deleted messages from murder victim Milly Dowler's mobile phone, giving her parents 'false hope' that she was still alive.

Despite the fact that we now know the Guardian story — which followed others detailing the hacking of messages left on celebrities' phones — was almost certainly untrue, this was the tipping point.

It is now academic to speculate how effective the lobbying being done by the Media Standards Trust network would have been without The Guardian's Milly Dowler deletion story.

The fact is that the day after its publication — call it coincidence or serendipity — the Media Standards Trust unveiled its Hacked Off campaign. The stated mission was to push 'on behalf of victims' for a full public inquiry into phone-hacking.

Donations to Hacked Off were held in a bank account 'managed by the Media Standards Trust'. Until it became a 'non-profit company' this summer, Hacked Off appeared on the MST accounts, which are lodged with the Charity Commission.

On those returns it is stated that the 'donations to Hacked Off are

MIDDLETON: I'M PROUD OF OUR CAMPAIGN

JULIA MIDDLETON said last night: 'I am proud of my private and personal association with the Media Standards Trust ... a campaign with which Common Purpose has no involvement whatsoever.' She added: 'While Hacked Off campaigned for broad terms of reference and for adequate powers for the Inquiry, to the best of my knowledge none of the organisations to which I am connected have had any role in selecting the assessors.'

Regarding charges that Common Purpose is 'secretive', she said: 'Common Purpose is a wholly transparent organisation. Full information about all our work, our courses and the process for applying for them, our staff and our governance can be found on our website.'

'Our alumni website is password-protected. This is normal practice.'

'Common Purpose is one of a great many training providers used by public sector bodies, as well as private and third sector organisations.'

Asked about the Information Commissioner's Office investigation, Ms Middleton would not comment on the 'blacklist', but said: 'They investigated fully, made recommendations and decided to take no further action. Common Purpose demonstrated a willingness to ensure that the future processing of personal data complies with the eight data protection principles.'

'Common Purpose is independent of all agendas and has no involvement whatsoever with the application process for senior public sector posts.'

made up of more than 50 separate amounts from individuals'. But who were these individuals pushing for greater press regulation? Where were they from? It does not say.

'No one will be surprised that the people who support us, and there are a large number of them, want, for the most part, their privacy,' Brian Cathcart, Professor in Journalism at Kingston University and one of Hacked Off's founders, recently explained.

So much for transparency. Less opaque are the identities of the campaign's high-profile activists. Hacked Off was founded by the aforementioned Professor Cathcart and MST director Dr Martin Moore.

Among those public figures present at Hacked Off's Westminster launch were Lord Cunningham — former New Labour minister and board member of Sovereign Strategy, 'Labour's favourite lobby group,' and Chris Bryant MP the former London Common Purpose manager.

The MST announced that supporters of the Hacked Off campaign also included Sir David Bell, Helena Kennedy (both with Common Purpose and MST links),

Ian Hargreaves (Leveson witness, former executive at Bell's Financial Times) and Blairite commentator John Lloyd, also of the FT.

An exultant Julia Middleton blogged that she had also attended the Hacked Off launch as a trustee of the MST — the campaign's parent body.

Events were going their way. Coulson was arrested on July 8. News International decided that the following Sunday's News of the World would be the last.

Hacked Off now seemed to be running the show.

Hugh Grant — who had just made unwelcome headlines by fathering a child after a casual affair — spoke for the campaign together with actor Steve Coogan, whose cocaine-fuelled assignments with lap dancers had been revealed by the red tops, and Max Mosley, whose sadomasochistic orgy was recorded by the News of the World.

On July 11, at the request of Hacked Off, the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, met Milly Dowler's parents and 'members of the Hacked Off team'.

The following day, The Guardian produced another front-page

bombshell. It claimed that The Sun had secured information on the medical condition of the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's son by illegally obtaining his medical records.

The story was wrong. But it would be four days before The Guardian published an apology.

By then, though, the Hacked Off campaign had achieved its goal. On July 13, David Cameron announced the terms of reference for an inquiry which would focus on events at News International. Lord Justice Leveson would lead it.

But in an example of the power now accorded them by politicians, Hacked Off made it clear it was unhappy with those terms. The lobby group wanted a much more wide-ranging inquiry which, among other matters, would examine the allegedly illegal actions of news groups other than News International.

A CLASSIC CASE OF ENTRYISM

BY July 20, they had their way on many of the points they demanded. Broader terms of reference were announced by Cameron. On its website, a euphoric Hacked Off claimed that it had 'secured' the

following changes to the Inquiry which now would include:

- THE conduct of politicians and the press;
- THE conduct of the press and the police;
- FAILURES of data protection;
- NEWSPAPER groups other than News International;
- MOBILE phone companies and others responsible for holding personal data;
- THE conduct of police forces other than the Metropolitan Police and the prosecution authorities, including the overlooking of evidence and inducements to police officers rather than simple corrupt payments;
- THE corporate governance of media organisations.

This was a triumph indeed. On July 28, Leveson himself remarked that the terms of reference 'in the week following the initial statement by the Prime Minister on July 13 grew very substantially'.

Thus a body that could trace its origins to David Bell's elitist Common Purpose, that was launched on the basis of an error about Milly Dowler, and supported by a motley crew of celebrities, politicians and lobbyists, had a hugely powerful influence on the terms of reference of a supposedly independent judicial inquiry.

Their strategy, it might be argued, was a classic case of entryism, whereby political organisations infiltrate key bodies and achieve power that is vastly disproportionate to their numbers, thereby effecting tumultuous change.

Hacked Off founder Brian Cathcart put it like this: 'Because Hacked Off existed as a group, because we had been thinking about a public inquiry and because we have connections with hacking victims, we were in a position to help a little in shaping the inquiry.'

'A little' was surely a modest assessment of Hacked Off's influence on Leveson. The Bell/Middleton

TURN TO NEXT PAGE