

James and Rupert Murdoch: humbled but not defeated (so far)

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[This was my instant response to the hearings – [a good analysis](#) is provided by the man who has done most to pursue the phonehacking scandal – [Nick Davies of the Guardian](#)]

It was clear that NewsCorp were looking for headlines that said 'humbled'. That is why they put the 'most humble day' line in for Rupert to read out in an opening statement. Then James would do the heavy lifting on details and avoid any major pitfalls.



Unfortunately, they were not allowed to read the statement and so Murdoch Senior's intervention came across as awkward if not weird. Tom Watson then focussed relentlessly in detail on Rupert so denying him the cover of his son's corporatese. The father responded curtly.

To Jim Sheridan MP he made it clear that he did not think himself 'responsible' for what went wrong despite being NewsCorp boss.

So at least to start with, James was made to look defensive and Rupert to look distracted and diffident. The drama of the event had actually created a critical tension without revealing any new significant information.

The line of questioning on how Rupert talks to editors was revealing, but only as circumstantial detail about his fascination with newspapers. He checks in regularly with Sunday Times but he doesn't dictate detail. Murdoch senior made it clear that the WSJ is a much higher priority than News International. Any conversation about phone-hacking would not have arisen in that kind of chat.

Most of the detail was shuffled off by James onto subordinates, which may well be realistic, but didn't explain why the top team were not more pro-active.

But some detail did emerge, such as the acknowledgement that payments were made to Goodman and Mulcaire after their conviction. What surprised me is that they did not have a better line on that. It was good to admit it (finally) and to say it was wrong (well doh!), but why not be sure why it had happened and why not be sure it can be stopped? I know this was in the past, but sometimes they are acting as if this isn't their company.

Paul Farrelly asked the right general question to Murdoch Senior – is it credible that an editor didn't know that hacking was going on? But he dodged it by referring to the on-going police investigations. Likewise their lawyers got blamed for keeping all those emails out of sight and giving poor advice.

It all turned into a Rumsfeldian zone of known knowns and unknown unknowns etc. That might be a defence but it doesn't seem a great way to run a business, let alone the transparent one that James seems so keen to run. (hence the new standards committee etc).

Rebekah Brooks was the anti-climax we all expected. Following her arrest there was little she could be pushed on and little was learnt beyond her stock denial to the suggestion that she must have known what was going on: "It sounds incredible but it's the truth".

In the end the custard-pie incident and Wendi Murdoch's defensive lunge probably gained them more sympathy than anything else that happened all day, but I don't think NewsCorp will be entirely distraught at the days

proceedings. The share price rose. Although I suspect that was because it now seems inevitable that there will be a change in roles and in the structure of NewsCorp's top management to deal with what will be a problem that goes on for much longer than this thundery summer.

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