

's old boy network



Influence: The Leveson team (from left) George Jones, Shami Chakrabarti, David Bell, Lord Justice Leveson, David Currie, Paul Scott-Lee and Elinor Goodman. Above: Common Purpose founder Julia Middleton

be based on 'unanimity' of thought between him and his half dozen assessors, none of whom have ever worked in the popular press. It should be stressed that there is absolutely no suggestion that Leveson — who did not choose his assessors — has any connection to Common Purpose nor that he isn't a man of integrity who has conducted his inquiry with impartiality. But imagine the public outcry if it emerged during a criminal trial that half of the jurors, and many of the witnesses, were linked to bodies that had "wailed" about the defendant, against whom they had a powerful shared antipathy. That is the case with the Leveson Inquiry, as we shall show in this investigation into the Bell and Middleton network of influence. We will also be raising questions about their charity's own behaviour. For we can reveal that... **COMMON PURPOSE** almost certainly breached the Data Protection Act (which guards the confidentiality of digitally stored information), the very charge levelled by the Leveson Inquiry against virtually all newspapers. **COMMON PURPOSE** is connected to some of Britain's most powerful lobby and PR groups, whose influence on British politics has provoked continuing controversy. **COMMON PURPOSE** linked figures have a significant influence on the appointments process in Whitehall. Until last year, Common Purpose's David Bell sat on the

committee that appointed Britain's 'Top 200' civil servants. As we shall now show, Hacked Off, one of the lobby groups created by Sir David Bell (who stepped down as chairman of the Media Standards Trust only when he was appointed a Leveson assessor) and Julia Middleton's network played a significant role in creating and shaping the Leveson Inquiry, which will cost the taxpayer almost £6 million. That is their campaign's proud boast. And, as we shall see in this investigation, it is hard to dispute. **IN JULIA MIDDLETON'S** book *Beyond Authority*, which sets out Common Purpose's leadership philosophy, she describes how she was told by a 'group of peers' the way in which to 'force' issues on to the agenda at Westminster. It required: 'A small committed and co-ordinated group of people producing pressure from the outside. Two or three determined fifth columnists on the inside. And the stamina from both groups to keep on and on and on putting them on the agenda until they eventually had to be discussed... In another passage she wrote: 'I spoke to a friend recently who described how she had set someone up. Using all her charm and flattery, she had drawn him in and then installed him as a convenient useful idiot... My friend's intention was to get him to produce a report which she knew full well would be a perfect smokescreen for her own activities... 'Have I ever done this? Yes... it was certainly useful to produce the distraction of creating a sub-committee, led by someone who did not really understand the big picture, to look into an issue in depth, with no timetable, so we could get on with what we saw as important issues.'

that individuals employed by the News of the World had illegally hacked the voicemail messages of mobile phones of hundreds of celebrities and people in the news, including murder victim Milly Dowler. Phone hacking is illegal. Currently dozens of journalists are under arrest in relation to such offences or making illegal payments to public officials. But it was the claim that the News of the World had deleted Milly's phone messages that provoked Prime Minister David Cameron — who against the advice of many had persisted in retaining former News of the World editor Andy Coulson as his press spokesman — to set up an inquiry into the British press, led by the respected Lord Justice Leveson. No matter that the Guardian's crucial allegation — that the News of the World had deleted voicemails from Milly's phone which caused her parents to have had false hopes that she was alive — turned out almost certainly not to be true. By the time that terrible error was revealed last December, the News of the World had been closed and the Inquiry widened to envelop the whole of the British press. That is the triumph of those who, like Bell, have striven for years towards restraining what they see as the 'excessive power' of the British press. Yet, far from representing the 'general public' and the 'people' — both terms which they frequently appropriate — those people who know best are drawn from a narrow and powerful section of the liberal Establishment that has come into

increasing conflict with much of Britain's newspaper industry. Significantly, among the leadership of Common Purpose, the Media Standards Trust and Hacked Off, vested interests intertwine. Many, but by no means all, of the most prominent activists are politically left of centre. Some are involved in the quangos that the New Labour project created. As such, they are representative of a new elite. Bodies such as the BBC, the London School of Economics and, as noted, Financial Times owner Pearson Group are conspicuously over-represented. 'Big money' in the form of senior executives from some multinational banks and financial institutions most culpable in the global financial crisis of 2008 (and the resulting multi-billion-pound public bailouts) is also a notable presence. No friends of the popular press, which has savaged City greed, are these. And at the heart of this matrix stand David Bell and Julia Middleton. Lib Dem donor and one-time SDP activist Bell is a former chairman of the Financial Times, at the time Fleet Street's most zealous supporter of the European Union. Bell is also a former director of the FT's parent company Pearson, which was a financial backer of New Labour. Mother-of-five Middleton is the founder, chief executive and presiding guru of Common Purpose. She has been described as 'messianic' in her crusade to improve standards in corporate and public life. The question, of course, is why do so many of her soirees end in 'a collective wail' about the irresponsibility of the media? A clue can perhaps be found in a speech made to the LSE in 2004 by Geoff Mulgan, with whom Middleton had founded the New Labour think-tank Demos, described by the Pearson-owned Economist magazine — of which David Bell is still a non-executive director — as 'Britain's most influential think-tank'. A Guardian report of the Mulgan speech was headlined 'The media's lies poison our system: The ethic of searching for truth has gone; now there's just cynicism'. Mulgan, who with Peter Mandelson was an intellectual founding father of New Labour and later became Blair's Head of Policy at No 10, thundered: 'Problematic, however, is the lack of a strong ethic of searching for the truth in much of the media... For from Europe to migrants, there is a wide gap between what the public believes and the facts... For many [newspapers] it doesn't much matter whether what they print is true. The net result is that the public are left with systematically incorrect perspectives on the world, on issues ranging from Europe and migrants to

Like a giant octopus, its tentacles reach into every cranny of the Establishment

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