

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

Claim No.

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION

BETWEEN:

TOM WATSON MP

Claimant

-and-

NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

Defendant

STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT

Solicitor for the Claimant

My Lord, I appear on behalf of the Claimant, Tom Watson MP. My friend Patrick Callaghan appears on behalf of the Defendant, News Group Newspapers Limited, the publisher of The Sun.

Since first being elected in June 2001, as a Member of Parliament for West Bromwich East, Mr Watson has served as parliamentary under secretary of state at the Ministry of Defence and from January 2008 until his resignation in June 2009 he held the post of Cabinet Office Minister with responsibility for issues concerning the Civil Service.

On 13 April 2009, the Defendant published an article in The Sun under the headline "Mad dog was trained to maul", which was illustrated with a cartoon in which the Claimant was depicted. The article followed revelations that Downing Street Press Adviser, Damian McBride, had sent emails to a Labour Party activist, Derek Draper, which made serious and false allegations about the private lives of a number of Conservative Party MPs in the course of discussing the possibility of setting up a website to be known as "Red Rag". In the article, written by Trevor Kavanagh, it was alleged that the Claimant was, alongside Damian McBride and Derek Draper, among the "motley crew" who dreamed up "grisly lies" about

David Cameron and George Osborne as part of their smear campaign against the Conservatives and that the Claimant's denial of involvement in this scandal-mongering was a lie.

The following day, on 14 April 2009, the Defendant published in The Sun an article entitled "Two Dinners Tom is behind this sick plot", accompanied by a prominent photograph of the Claimant. In this article, written by Fergus Shanahan, it was alleged that the Claimant was behind the plot to smear the Conservatives by spreading obscene lies about them and again it was alleged that the Claimant has shamelessly lied when denying his involvement.

Both articles were also published online.

The Defendant has made an offer of amends to the Claimant. It now accepts that these allegations concerning the Claimant are entirely untrue. The Claimant was not a party to the smear campaign.

The Claimant was not copied in on, nor did he know about any of the emails between Mr McBride and Mr Draper until Friday 10 April, when the matter was first drawn by the media to the attention of Downing Street. He did not have any involvement in or knowledge of the "Red Rag" website.

Accordingly, the Claimant did not lie when he publicly denied involvement by way of press releases issued first by him on 12 April and then on 14 April by Carter-Ruck solicitors on his behalf.

The false allegations against the Claimant, and the sensational tone of the articles, compounded by repeated suggestions in surrounding coverage in The Sun that he should resign or be sacked, have caused the Claimant acute distress, humiliation and embarrassment. The allegations caused the Claimant's professional and personal reputation substantial damage. The Claimant found the articles deeply offensive and the allegation in the second publication that the Claimant was involved in smearing David Cameron knowing that Samantha Cameron was grieving over the tragic death of her son caused him particular distress.

In recognition of the damage caused by the publication of these false allegations, the Defendant has agreed, through its solicitor today, to apologise to the Claimant and to

undertake not to repeat the same or similar allegations. The Defendant has agreed to pay a substantial sum in damages and the Claimant's legal costs. On this basis, the Claimant is prepared to let the matter rest.

Solicitor for the Defendant

My Lord, I accept everything my friend has said. The Defendant unreservedly withdraws the allegations in question and apologises to the Claimant for the damage these allegations have caused.

Solicitor for the Claimant

My Lord, in all the circumstances, the Claimant's object in bringing these proceedings has been achieved.

Carter - Ruck
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