

## Murdoch firm settles 9 more hacking lawsuits

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This photo of May 22, 2011 shows comedian Steve Coogan who received a settlement of 40,000 pounds (\$63,500) from Rupert Murdoch's UK newspaper company over phone hacking. Nine more phone hacking lawsuits against Rupert Murdoch's News International have been settled, including a case brought by comedian Steve Coogan, the victims' lawyer told Britain's High Court on Wednesday Feb. 8, 2012. That brings to more than 60 the number of claims that Murdoch's UK newspaper company has dealt with in the scandal that has already brought down a 168-year-old tabloid and threatened Murdoch's global media empire. (AP Photo/Ian West/PA Wire, File) UNITED KINGDOM OUT NO SALES NO ARCHIVE

(AP) -- Rupert Murdoch's News International has settled nearly all the

cases against the company in the first wave of lawsuits for phone hacking by its journalists, with a new round of apologies and payouts announced Wednesday in a London court.

But a potentially damaging claim lodged by British singer Charlotte Church is still headed to trial later this month and a wave of new lawsuits - as many as 56 in all - is looming, lawyers told London's High Court.

News International, a division of News Corp., has tried hard to keep phone hacking cases from going to trial, launching its own compensation program overseen by a respected former judge and paying out millions of pounds (dollars) in all in out-of-court settlements for about 60 cases.

On Wednesday, lawyers announced that nine more lawsuits filed on behalf of about a dozen different people had been settled, including cases brought by comedian Steve Coogan, former soccer star Paul Gascoigne and maverick lawmaker George Galloway.

"This has never been about money," said Coogan, who received a settlement of 40,000 pounds (\$63,500). "Like other people who have sued, I was determined to do my part to show the depths to which the press can sink in pursuit of private information."

Gascoigne received 68,000 pounds (\$108,000), while Simon Hughes, deputy leader of Britain's Liberal Democrat party, received 45,000 pounds (\$71,500). Galloway, known for his uncompromising opposition to the Iraq war, received 25,000 pounds (\$39,700) and an admission from News International lawyer Michael Silverleaf that the company had intercepted five of the lawmaker's voicemails around the time of the 2003 invasion.

Sally King, a friend of former British Home Secretary David Blunkett, received 60,000 pounds (\$95,300), while her husband, Andrew, received

50,000 pounds (\$79,400). Silverleaf acknowledged that a News of the World journalist even followed the pair to the U.S. as they tried to find refuge there from the press.

Her father and brother also received substantial damages, as did former Labour Party strategist Alastair Campbell and a series of other claimants.

After each settlement, Silverleaf said the Murdoch company had accepted responsibility and regretted the damage it had caused. The company also agreed to pay the claimants' legal fees.

The lawsuits stem from revelations of phone-hacking and other illegal tactics at the now-defunct Murdoch tabloid, the News of the World, where journalists routinely intercepted voicemails of those in the public eye in a relentless search for scoops.

Murdoch closed the 168-year-old paper in July amid a wave of public revulsion over its 2002 interception of voicemails belonging to a missing 13-year-old girl, Milly Dowler, who was later found murdered. Murdoch and his company paid millions to the Dowler family.

But the lawsuit by Church, a former child singing prodigy, heads into court beginning Feb. 28. It is one of the more embarrassing cases for Murdoch, who had the angel-voiced singer perform at his wedding when she was only 13.

Silverleaf said Church's lawsuit was "one of the more complicated cases, and one where the claimants have taken a particularly polarized view."

Last year Church testified before a British media ethics inquiry that Murdoch's newspapers and other British tabloids had spent years tormenting her, often while she was just in her teens, blowing her

credibility "to bits" and damaging her career. She detailed how cameramen had tried to take photos up her skirt and how reporters had published details about her sex life when she was just 17.

Wednesday's arguments between Church's lawyer David Sherborne and Silverleaf largely focused on how the court would measure the toll that journalists' attention took on her mental health and her family's business.

A lawyer for the News of the World's private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, who Church is also suing, asked that the case be heard at least in part in secret to avoid prejudicing any potential criminal case against Mulcaire. Judge Geoffrey Vos, however, indicated such a move would be unlikely.

Vos said he was "extremely hostile" to imposing blanket reporting restrictions on the Church case because of the public interest in letting the facts be known. He said he might consider an "appropriate, limited order" at a later hearing.

Despite the latest Murdoch settlements, there's no end in sight yet to the scandal. Victims' lawyer Hugh Tomlinson told the court that six more people had decided to sue and that 50 others were at various stages in preparing their lawsuits.

At the same time, three parallel police investigations are under way into wrongdoing not only at the News of the World but also at two other Murdoch papers in Britain, The Sun and The Times. More than a dozen ex-Murdoch employees have been arrested and several executives have resigned.

British politicians and police also have been ensnared in the scandal, which exposed the cozy relationship between senior officers, top lawmakers and newspaper executives and the bribery of police for

information.

The government-commissioned ethics inquiry is currently investigating British media practices and media links to police and politicians. Heather Mills, the former wife of musician Paul McCartney, is expected to testify before that inquiry Thursday.

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