

Dear Sir,

As a committed supporter of the Leveson Report which sought to provide some independent scrutiny of the effects of Press excesses in reporting, can I please ask that you give the most serious consideration to the full implementation of the Leveson proposals?

For too long the Press had been able to act with impunity when attacking members of the public, both ordinary and celebrities, confident that the laws of libel were too expensive to use in seeking redress against a powerful corporation which could hound to destruction anyone brave enough to raise any challenge. An individual's reputation could be destroyed overnight with almost no consideration for the effects of extreme reporting, and the possibility of redress for the victim was distant, difficult and potentially terribly costly.

I believe it is essential, and a fundamental axiom of democracy, that a free press is able to publish whatever it wants to. But I do not believe that a free press should be able to print damaging and unfounded stories about individuals without facing any consequences other than the tortuous libel courts where costs are entirely prohibitive for all but the very wealthiest. An independent panel (truly independent, not staffed by newspapermen guarding their own publications - "marking their own homework" in Leveson's own words) is essential to ensure that bounds of common decency are not regularly trampled over simply to publish a sensational "story", where there is little real evidence that a story exists. Such an independent panel would give the public a great deal of comfort, including the power to throw out complaints which simply demanded the press be silenced. Protecting a free press is just as important as asking for a free press to behave responsibly.

If the panel is truly independent it could serve the country very well indeed by protecting press and public alike. If it consists largely of press nominees, it will fare no better, and be just as impotent and just as derided as the old PCC.

I have seen Hacked Off's submission to you on this subject, and I am in absolute agreement with their entire case which seems to me to answer the requirements of Leveson fully, and retain the necessary freedoms which the press needs to do the job properly. The fact that their submission has been prepared in consultation with some of the victims of truly appalling press coverage gives their view an added poignancy and relevance, which should resonate with you, I feel. I commend their arguments to you.

I wish you every success in your deliberations, and would merely add that I think the public will measure your work on one simple criterion. Did you deliver what Leveson said was necessary? Or were you led away to a watered down version which was little more than the PCC with a change of clothing. I fervently hope you are able to meet the challenge and help strengthen the press and the sense of responsibility which informs its work.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Callaghan