

I am mostly known for editing the Guido Fawkes blog where we have for years mocked the decline of what we call the dead tree press. We're often unfairly characterised as enemies of the newspaper business. It is not true, I love the news business. In fact, I was from the age of 12 to 15 a paperboy, possibly the slowest paperboy in the land because I read everything from The Sun to the FT. I only quit being a paperboy when some bloody editor quadrupled the size of the Sunday Times and it damn near broke my back carrying them around and trying to fit them into letterboxes. Whatever happened to that editor?

I am perhaps the only person to have had three summonses from Lord Justice Leveson and probably the first journalist and hopefully the last to be censored by him. He ordered me to take down Alistair Campbell's witness statement to the Inquiry from my blog. It seems just like everyone else in the media, he didn't like being scooped by us.

I believe the Leveson recommendations are a threat to the freedom of the press for at least three fundamental reasons:

Firstly the principle of giving politicians any role in regulating the press, however limited, is a bad one. Politicians will always complain about the press because the proper relationship between the press and politicians is as that between a dog and a lamp post. There is potential for menace if politicians have any say in the freedom of the press.

Secondly, it will turn judges into censors.

Thirdly, if you make the press any more boring, they will have fewer readers and go bankrupt sooner. Be in no doubt that the chilling effect of Leveson makes papers more boring.

Let me develop my first point:

The politicians claim that a statutory underpinning will not lead to them menacing the press. I say they are already menacing the press as the threat of legislation looms. The first time I met Chris Bryant was at an event held a few years ago by the Press Complaints Commission - they were worried about how to regulate an offshore based website like mine - I told them not to worry they can't regulate it. Anyway towards the end of the seminar Chris told me to my face, in front of everyone, in so many words, that he wished to see my site closed down. Let me repeat that: he wished to see my site closed down. Mr Bryant now expects me to believe that he is a guardian of a free press. Mr Bryant will no doubt protest that he only wants to see decent media standards enforced, whenever you hear one of the great and the good use the phrase "media standards", know this, they really mean censorship.

What about Tom Watson, the hyperbolic scourge of Murdoch, what kind of guardian of the free press is he? Well Harry Cole who works for me once wrote something on the blog that Mr Watson didn't like. Harry also co-writes a column with me in the Daily Star on Sunday. Tom Watson called the editor of the Star to complain about what he had written. Harry also

contributes to the Speccie, Watson called Fraser Nelson to complain. Fraser gave him short shrift so Watson called the publisher of the Speccie to complain about Fraser and Harry. Tom Watson was trying to get Harry sacked for displeasing him. Now this was when Watson was on the Media Select Committee, leading the charge against News International and all the rest. If Watson had a statutory lever he would have pulled it and opened the trapdoor under Harry, a young journalist.

The fact is that the existence of the Leveson Inquiry - never mind the outcome of it - has already had a chilling effect. Since the closure of the News of the World not one single politician has been caught with his pants down - that's nothing personal Chris. They have either all become true to their wives or the papers are afraid to rile the political class. A lack of extra-marital affairs reported is an unhealthy state of affairs.

Why is it an unhealthy state of affairs? All my experience tells me that it is a truism that the type of politician that cheats on his wife is the type of politician who lies to the voters. A free press informs the public as to the true character of our public figures, not the false public image they would wish us believe.

Any hint of statutory underpinning gives those politicians leverage that they just should never have.

My second point was that it will turn judges into censors, even more than they already are. Now here it gets really interesting, Max Mosley in his submission to the Leveson Inquiry wanted a requirement for journalism to

be in the public interest, legally defined. Defined so as to preclude anyone finding out about his private interests. He also wants prior notification before publication - presumably so that someone as rich as himself can tie newspapers down in legal bondage before publishing.

You know, I would have thought that as someone who enjoys a bit of painful humiliation Max would have been grateful to the News of the World, taken the humiliation on that Sunday when he was exposed and kept his head down for a time rather than making a campaign out of it. No doubt causing intense further embarrassment for his wife and family. Max Mosley isn't someone who suffers from low self esteem. I have been given nine minutes to speak so perhaps it will give Mr Mosley an opportunity to take a few seconds to pause for self reflection. You have made a cause of press regulation because you were humiliated and exposed to public ridicule. By the time we have finished tonight I hope you will have reflected and explained your motivation.

My third point is that the newspapers are in the midst of an existential crisis, implementing Leveson will mean that public figures will be able to carry on in private, safe in the knowledge that the public will not learn about their misbehaviour in the papers. The broadsheets are now almost entirely loss making vanity publishing operations, the popular press relies on celebrity stories to sell papers. It has always been this way, the popular press of old reported on the doings of princes and actresses, the popular press of today reports on footballers and WAGs - actually it still reports on the doings of princes and actresses. That is what sells papers and pays for

the papers to cover the more important issues that inform our public life. Kill the infotainment in newspapers and you kill the popular mass media.

Those of us on this side of the argument who believe that 'Leveson is a fundamental threat to the free press' argue for this out of principle. The other side all stand to personally benefit, if Max got his way he could thwack away without worrying about hacks exposing him to ridicule, Charlotte would have much more legal business going to Court to suppress stories for her clients with ease. And Chris, well Chris will never again have to suffer his Y-fronts being seen on the front-pages. On our side Leveson would benefit us too, John Whittingdale would be less harassed by journalists if they were more afraid of his influence. Richard Littlejohn is a commentator paid to express his opinion, not do investigative journalism, so he would probably get commissioned to write even more columns to fill up the white spaces in the paper where investigative journalism used to be - if Bryant and Mosley got their way. If the press was muzzled, restricted by privacy rules and the rest, my website would prosper, offshore and unregulated. My commercial interest would be best served by shackling the British press and making all newspapers as boring as the Independent. Readers would flock to my website to find out what was really going on, it would make me wealthy. All six of us stand to gain from emasculating the press, only the three of us on our side commend to you to vote with us for the motion out of principle. The principle being that a free press is all that restrains the rich and powerful from behaving badly.