

Christopher Jefferies

Bristol,

[Address]

May 12th 2017

Dear [party leader],

We are writing to remind you of your party's promises over the last five years to implement the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry¹, and to seek confirmation that your election manifesto will reiterate your commitment to genuinely independent and effective self-regulation of the press.

It is now nearly five years since Sir Brian Leveson delivered his report, following a year-long inquiry in which many of us testified to the trauma and distress inflicted on us by some sections of the press.² His report concluded that some newspapers had "wreaked havoc in the lives of ordinary people" and made a series of moderate and sensible proposals for audited self-regulation which guaranteed press freedom while holding the press accountable for its behaviour.

These proposals, implemented via a Royal Charter and provisions in the Crime and Courts Act 2013, were endorsed by a huge majority in the House of Commons – including the personal votes of the current party leaders – and without division in the House of Lords.³ They were supported by the free speech group Article 19; eminent free press campaigners and journalists such as Sir Tom Stoppard, Salman Rushdie and Sir Harry Evans; the National Union of Journalists; and the great majority of law and journalism academics. Moreover, successive polls have consistently demonstrated that these proposals are supported by over three quarters of British voters.⁴

Some progress has been made and we were encouraged by the setting up of the Press Recognition Panel, entirely removed from any political influence, and the PRP's rigorous application of Leveson principles to the one self-regulator, IMPRESS, which successfully applied for recognition.

We remain frustrated, however, that the key provision of the Crime and Courts Act providing for incentives and penalties that are vital elements of the recognition process, has yet to be commenced. Without its implementation the framework which Leveson so carefully constructed, and which Parliament approved, is meaningless. As the PRP said in its first Annual Report to Parliament, "Until [Section 40 is commenced] free speech and the public interest cannot be safeguarded".⁵

We are aware that all political parties have been lobbied intensively by the major press corporations seeking to obstruct further progress, while attempting to reassure Parliament and the public that its new creation, the "Independent Press Standards Organisation", is capable of effective self-regulation. IPSO was launched amidst vehement assertions by newspaper executives, supported by their own editorials and paid columnists, that it would launch investigations, impose fines of up to one million pounds, and bring an end to flagrant abuse of its own editorial code.

It has manifestly failed. The continuing abuses and transgressions of IPSO's code, and inability of IPSO to demonstrate either independence or effectiveness, have been well documented⁶. An independent analysis by the Media Standards Trust demonstrated that IPSO failed to meet 20 of the 38 Leveson criteria. A unanimous all-party report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

in February of this year concluded that IPSO clearly does not meet all the requirements of the Royal Charter and “falls short of being Leveson compliant”.⁷

Meanwhile, periodic announcements by its chairman of “improvements” to IPSO’s procedures over the last 3 years have merely followed the “pattern of cosmetic change” which Leveson identified as the predictable consequence of every previous enquiry into press standards.

We are therefore no closer to genuinely effective self-regulation than we were under the discredited Press Complaints Commission. As victims of some of the worst excesses of press abuse under that system we do not believe this situation is equitable or sustainable, and we are determined that others should not have to endure the distress inflicted on us by newspapers accountable only to themselves.

Part 2 of the Leveson Inquiry

There is a legal requirement for Part 2 of the Leveson Inquiry under the 2005 Inquiries Act. Its remit is to examine the extent of criminal wrongdoing across newspaper groups, how such large scale criminality could have gone undetected by major news companies, and in particular how the Metropolitan Police failed to properly investigate the allegations.⁸

A sustained campaign of misinformation has been directed at the second stage by the corporate press, and a full rebuttal of these myths has been published by the campaign for a free and accountable press.⁹ In particular, we would draw your attention to the new evidence of criminality, corrupt practices and police failure which has emerged since the Leveson report was published in 2012:

- the conviction of “fake sheikh” Mazher Mahmood;
- evidence of a decade of phone hacking by three national titles owned by Mirror Group Newspapers;¹⁰
- a court finding that the Leveson Inquiry was given wrong information by newspaper executives;
- allegations of phone hacking at the Sun as well as the News of the World;
- unanswered questions about cover-ups over the Hillsborough disaster and the Daniel Morgan murder.

Because of ongoing civil and criminal trials during the first stage of the Leveson inquiry, many issues around the criminality, the cover-ups, and the evolution of a toxic corporate culture within powerful press corporations could not be addressed. This is particularly relevant in the context of the proposed full takeover of Sky by a Murdoch-owned 21st Century Fox, and Ofcom’s ongoing enquiry into whether Fox is sufficiently “fit and proper” to own a UK broadcasting licence.

As victims of that culture of illegality, which was consistently denied by executives and editors at the highest level, we would feel betrayed by any attempt to sideline or dilute the Part 2 terms of reference which were designed to expose how such a culture could be concealed for so long.

We remain wholly committed to a free press, public interest journalism, and freedom of expression. As the CMS Select Committee recognised, nothing in the Leveson framework remotely threatens press freedom, and we fully endorse the committee’s description of some press arguments as “unconvincing and misleading”. Our concern is simply about access to justice for ordinary people and protection from a powerful, unaccountable, centralised industry which still systematically ignores its editorial codes with impunity.

We are therefore asking all parties to give us their assurance that, should they form a government after the June election, they will commit both to full implementation of Leveson's recommendations for an effective system of independently audited self-regulation of the press; and to part two of the Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the press.

We remain as determined as we were when giving our evidence 6 years ago – sometimes under very difficult circumstances – to ensure that there should be no further victims of press wrongdoing, and to see effective press self-regulation in the interests of “the many and not the few”.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Jefferies

Gerry & Kate McCann

Margaret Aspinall CBE and Sue Roberts, Hillsborough Family Support Group

Alastair Morgan

Sheila & Martin Hollins

Jacqui Hames

Edward Bowles

Tricia & Phil Bernal

¹ <http://hackinginquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Conservative-commitments-to-incentives-Table-.pdf>

² <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140122145147/http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc1213/hc07/0780/0780.asp>

³ [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-03-18/division/1303197000632/CrimeAndCourtsBill\(Lords\)?outputType=Names](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-03-18/division/1303197000632/CrimeAndCourtsBill(Lords)?outputType=Names)

⁴ <http://hackinginquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/App-5-Poll-results.xls>

⁵ <http://pressrecognitionpanel.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PRP-Annual-Report-on-the-Recognition-System-1.pdf>

⁶ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/communications-committee/press-regulation/written/18435.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/culture-media-and-sport/Culture-Media-Sport-Committee-reponse-to-Government-consultation-on-press-regulation.pdf>

⁸ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140122145147/http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/about/terms-of-reference/>

⁹ <http://hackinginquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Leveson-P2-Myth-Buster.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://hackinginquiry.org/comment/mirror-phone-hacking-dont-let-them-fool-you-most-victims-were-ordinary-people/>

Appendix: backgrounds of the signatories

Christopher Jefferies

Monitored by the press after the murder of Joanna Yeates and libelled by several newspapers; some of whom were successfully prosecuted for contempt of court.

Gerry & Kate McCann

Serially libelled by many newspapers, now including by the Sunday Times, long after the Leveson Inquiry.

Margaret Aspinall CBE and Sue Roberts, Hillsborough Family Support Group

The Sun has never apologised effectively for terrible things they said about the victims of the tragedy and the libel of the City of Liverpool. Kelvin MacKenzie was rehired for the newspaper recently, only to be sacked for targeting further abuse at the city. Their former managing editor, recently criticised by the Hillsborough Panel for his rejection of complaints at the time, served on the Board of IPSO, nominated by the press industry, and was replaced by Trevor Kavanagh who also worked for The Sun at the time and contributed to the slurs.

Alastair Morgan

His brother Daniel was murdered in 1987. Multiple police inquiries into the murder have since collapsed amidst evidence of MPS corruption and evidence that News of the World journalists attempted to subvert an investigation into the murder. Alastair fights for justice for his brother to this day, and a Home Office appointed panel is investigating the case.

Baroness Sheila & Martin Hollins

The family were subject to horrific press intrusion by multiple newspapers which continued for 5 years after their daughter Abigail Witchalls was stabbed in a park and left paralysed.

Jacqui Hames

A serving police officer, she and her family were subjected to surveillance and voicemail interception after her Crimewatch programme sought witnesses to the Daniel Morgan murder.

Edward Bowles

Mr Bowles lost his son Sebastian in March 2012, when he was on a coach of school children which crashed in Switzerland on a school trip. He and his family were doorstepped by journalists afterwards and intrusive photographs were published of his family as they grieved, resulting in them having to arrange security for Sebastian's funeral. Images of Sebastian and his blog entries were also used in newspapers and online without consent, and private family holiday photographs were obtained without consent and published. This took place during the Leveson Inquiry.

Tricia & Phil Bernal

Victims of hacking and other intrusion by various newspapers after the murder of their daughter and sister, Clare, in 2005 in Harvey Nichols.