



The unexamined Press

The government yesterday announced that the follow-up to the Leveson Inquiry would now not be happening after all.

You may remember five years ago Lord Leveson led an enquiry into general press standards. His conclusion was that there had to be an independent press regulator. Furthermore, he limited his scope in the first report because there would be a follow-up enquiry that would deal with all the specific allegations of how the press conspired with the police to hack the phones of various celebrities or newsworthy people.

His first and central conclusion was ignored: this body does not exist. Now, the second aspect, which would have resulted in individual prosecution and which would have given victims the chance to find out exactly how what happened to them came about, has been dropped as well.

Where the culture secretary, and the wider press, has a point is this: they are no longer the Big Beasts. The traditional press are struggling to scrape their living, overwhelmed by Facebook, Twitter and the rest. 'Going after' them is now no longer priority number one. Indeed, given the prospect that they will go out of business, it is argued that it is invidious to do so.

The emptiness of this argument, however, is demonstrated by the treatment of Max Mosley. Mosley is a strange character. A dozen years ago, The News of

the World uncovered that he was partial to being spanked by dominatrices who spoke in German accents. The public interest of this story came because Mosley was an international broker for Formula one and this demonstrated his Nazi/ racist sympathies.

When Mosley sued, the judge ruled that the News of the World had not had a legitimate public interest in publishing this. In a wide ranging judgement, he noted that, in S&M circles, German or Russian accents were used interchangeably and one could not draw a racist related conclusion regarding the paying participant's views from this accent. Who knew?

A decade on, the Daily Mail has discovered a pamphlet from a 1961 election where Mosley backed a candidate, promulgating racist views. This bit of evidence had been missed in the earlier trial but might have tipped the balance in favour of the original tabloid story being in the public interest as it would have shown the historical background to Mosley's racism.

So far, so good. Tenacious journalism, uncovering what was not known. Fair enough.

The problem is that this spirit of transparency is not applied when it comes to them: when it comes to someone tenaciously uncovering the Press's own dirty secrets, then it is a different story: they are quite happy to drop it, and encourage the government to do the same. What a disgrace. Everyone gets held to account... except journalists.

March 2018. *for the Train* is a short column by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.