

Midland News Association

The Midland News Association Ltd.

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The Leveson Inquiry
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9th July 2012

Dear Ms Brudenell

Thank you for your letter of 29th June 2012. May I answer each of your questions in turn:

1. My name is Adrian Faber and I am the Editor of the Express & Star, Wolverhampton.

I have been visited by Lord Hunt who has explained the broad principles of his thinking regarding the new system of self regulation. However, I was not aware of Lord Black's submission, prior to receiving your letter in the afternoon on Friday, 29th June. I then located Lord Black's papers on the Inquiry website, and read them. Neither I nor my colleagues have had time to think through the implications of the proposal.

2. I have been kept up to date with regular Newspaper Society briefings as the proposals have developed and have had the opportunity to comment on these proposals. I was the only regional editor to attend a meeting of lawyers at RPC Solicitors in London on 31st May 2012, to discuss the proposals in detail.

I think I have been given every opportunity to comment on the proposals, though that is very different from actually drawing them up (or agreeing with them).

3. I would expect to be involved in discussions before a final decision was taken about whether The Midland News Association Ltd, the publisher of the Express & Star, would sign up to the new contractual arrangements.

However, it is important to understand that our proprietors will make the final decision. I will merely be an advisor.

4. For the reasons stated above, neither I nor The Midland News Association Ltd are able to give the Inquiry any kind of commitment with regard to Lord Black's proposals at the present time.
5. In terms of the stories we carry and the way we go about our work, Lord Black's proposals would make little difference to us. We already abide by what we regard as the high standards and the best practice; we do not engage in any underhand methods; we comply fully with the PCC's Code; and last but not most certainly not least, we abide by the law.

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Our commercial success and the low level of complaints we receive is testament to the ethical way in which we operate.

6. You invite me to make additional comments on Lord Black's proposals. I wish to raise three matters, as follows:

a. In paragraph 11 of his witness statement, Lord Black writes: "*Self regulation, based only on conciliation of disputes as operated through the PCC, is no longer sustainable.*"

Whilst I understand the point that Lord Black is making about the effectiveness of the PCC at a strategic level, neither I nor my proprietors accept that this is a valid assessment of the PCC's role so far as the Express & Star and its readers are concerned.

We have absolutely no doubt that the PCC is an effective regulator. It is very simple: if any reader feels aggrieved about a story appearing in the Express & Star and complains to the PCC, s/he has an effective way of seeking redress. We will fight our corner if we disagree with the complainant, but if the PCC agrees with our reader, then we accept the PCC's determination and fulfil our obligations to publicise, and comply with, the PCC's ruling.

What could be more straightforward or effective?

b. The Inquiry has heard a good deal of evidence about unethical and allegedly criminal conduct by a small number of people working within the national press. As I have already stated, no-one working within the regional press ever engages in this kind of conduct.

We are concerned, therefore, that the evidence of unacceptable behaviour on the part of the national press will be used to argue that such misbehaviour is rife throughout regional newspapers as well, which proves that the current system of self regulation is completely broken.

We do not accept this argument. What has allegedly happened within parts of the national press was not necessarily due to a failure on the part of the regulator but rather, to a failure by the individuals and companies concerned to comply with the law and with their professional obligation to behave ethically, and to a failure by the police and prosecuting authorities to investigate and prosecute alleged criminality.

Our strong opinion, in short, is that there is a real risk that the regional press risks being punished for the (alleged) wrongdoings of a small number of people working for the national press.

The current system has worked very well for the Express & Star, all other regional newspapers, and for the public. The regional press should not be penalised for the misdeeds of others.

c. I am very concerned that Lord Black's proposed regulations will place a very expensive administrative burden on the very limited resources available to editorial departments of regional newspapers, which will be quite disproportionate to any benefit which may accrue.

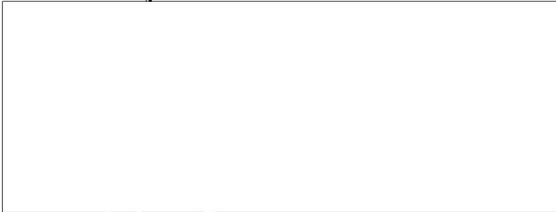
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Lord Black's plan will lead, I fear, to greater costs and greater bureaucracy, without achieving any significant benefits. I suspect small publishers will find it extremely difficult to bear these additional costs.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely



~~Adrian Faber~~
Editor