### Questions by MS PATRY-HOSKINS

#### MR JONATHAN GEORGE SNOW (sworn)

Q.  If I move on to your career history, please, Mr Snow.

A.  That is entirely accurate, yes.

Q.  Again, before we turn to newspapers, you note at the end of this section, right before the answer on 2(b), at the top of page 2:

"Viewers need to be assured that the regulatory system accords them a right to question whether we have done our job properly and to provide for them to complain should they wish to demand a wrong be put right. Ofcom has maintained a useful and balanced role in this regard."

Q.  Can you expand a little on that; why do you take the view this role has been provided?

A.  Well, I think that the role of the regulator has improved vastly over the years. When I first started in television it was pretty kind of shambolic. There was very little legal input into it. It was conducted by well meaning and bright people but nevertheless it wasn't as coherent as it is now. I can illustrate this by saying when I started in the 70s you would see a lawyer in the office perhaps once a month. Maybe a little more, maybe once a week sometimes. Now there

Q.  Let's move on to the first section of your statement, dealing with the relationship between politicians and the media.

A.  The views in this statement are entirely my own and they have no bearing on anything my employers may think or otherwise wish.

Q.  Thank you very much indeed. Turning to your career history, please, Mr Snow.

A.  I encompass both the written and the electronic media, history, Mr Snow?

Q.  You then go on to differentiate between broadcast media and newspapers. You say this:

"Television and video have long been governed by a regulator and that regulation has been rationalised and strengthened. The regime ensures that I am aware of conflicts and of interest and constantly aware of the need for balance."

Then you say this:

"The ownership aspects of the regulatory regime have no so far impacted on my work."

Before we move on to what you say about newspapers, let me ask about the relationship between television or broadcast journalists and politicians in this way: Ofcom is your regulator. As a political journalist and somebody who obviously regularly interviews politicians and, some might say, holds them to account, has the Ofcom system of regulation, in your view, ever hindered you in that process?

A.  I can't honestly think of a single occasion on which I have wanted to proceed with something which I believed to be in the public interest and journalistically sound that has been stopped by anything to do with regulation. Obviously there are lots of compliance issues about right to reply and the rest of it, but I have never found it a burden.

Q.  Let's move on to the first section of your statement, dealing with the relationship between politicians and the media.

A.  First of all, could you give your full name to the inquiry?

MS PATRY-HOSKINS:  You have provided us with a witness statement dated 14 May 2012. Could you please confirm that is your formal evidence to this inquiry?

A.  That is my formal evidence, yes.

Q.  If I move on to your career history, please, Mr Snow.

A.  Jonathan George Snow.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON:  Thank you.

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1. isn't one single story that I am participating in on
2. Channel 4 News which is not checked by a lawyer.
3. So the whole sense of respecting the regulatory
4. process is very much alive and with us, but I would say
5. that the legal scrutiny and the regulatory scrutiny is
6. scrutiny designed to try to get the story on the air,
7. but to ensure it gets on the air in a fair and balanced
8. way.
9. As far as the written press is concerned, I mean,
10. well, I can't say that any of us looking in on the PCC
11. process can honestly look to it and say there is a great
12. example of regulatory authority. Judges are judges in
13. their own cause, so you have editors who have often
14. themselves offended judging other editors. It seems to
15. me that their regulatory process is exactly the
16. antithesis of ours, which is in fact to ensure that the
17. public is not protected but that the newspaper publishes
18. and is not damned.
19. Q. We will come on to discuss perhaps the future of press
20. regulation in a little more detail. Can we move back
21. though to newspapers. You explain that you consider
22. there to be a difference between broadcast journalists
23. and newspapers. What is the difference and what special
24. pressures are their on newspapers, in your view?
25. A. I think the difference fundamentally is that newspapers

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1. are clearly opinionated. They have an opinion from
2. which they spring and you don't need me to tell you who
3. springs from which proclivity but it would be blind not
4. to accept that they have an ideological axe to grind.
5. It may vary, but it is there.
6. We are simply not allowed that. We do not -- we
7. have to make a very clear distinction between what is
8. news and what is opinion. In the newspaper, I would say
9. that this is an extremely blurred area. Very often, you
10. see news stories that you have yourself covered which
11. bear almost no relation to what you have experienced in
12. that story because the thing has been given a very
13. specific slant to fit with the ideological outlook of
14. the paper.
15. Q. Right. We have heard from witnesses this morning on the
16. same subject, the blurring of the line between news and
17. comment. Is this a concern in your view, and if so, why
18. is it a concern?
19. A. Well, you know, what is truth, asked Pontius Pilate, and
20. that is a pretty big question. If truth is something
21. which is supported by the facts, then it seems to me
22. that we have some building blocks towards reporting
23. a good story and a story that is true. I think if the
24. building blocks are interfered with by cement that is in
25. some way contaminated with a view into which these

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1. building blocks have to fit then I think you start to
2. get a wildly distorted account of what is actually going
3. on. I think that happens a great deal.
4. Q. Could it not be said that an informed reader would be
5. able to differentiate between the news and comment
6. aspects of a particular story or article?
7. A. Yes, one should never underestimate the capacity of the
8. viewer and the reader to see through what the media is
9. up to. That I fully accept. But sometimes some of this
10. is extremely cleverly done and if it is done in
11. extremely emotive terms, as with issues like welfare or
12. immigration or any of the great political issues of our
13. time, if it becomes contaminated with a view that a
14. certain course of action should be pursued and the news
15. story is made to fit these parameters, then I think you
16. get into some difficulty.
17. Q. All right. Well, you raise it as a concern. This
18. blurring between the two is already prohibited by the
19. PCC editors' code. I don't know if you are aware of
20. that. Is there anything more that could be done to
21. address this concern, in your view?
22. A. Well, I think the biggest thing that can be done is very
23. clear signposting. I don't one should in any way treat
24. the reader as an idiot, but I think it should be very
25. clear -- and I believe -- my own experience of living in

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1. the United States for a period of time is that there it
2. is much clearer. The New York Times and Washington Post
3. are very clear as to what is opinion and what is news,
4. and although you can argue that they may have mild
5. ideological affiliations, generally speaking, I think
6. you get a clearer account of what is going on.
7. Q. Do you mean signposting in the sense that each page
8. would have, at the top of it, whether or not news or
9. comment appears on that page or do you mean in
10. a headline it should be made clear, or does it not
11. matter?
12. A. No, I think you can only compartmentalise it, as you
13. suggest, with a heading at the top of the page, which
14. suggests opinion is on there. Some of the broadsheets
15. do that perfectly happily and it is very clear that
16. opinion pages are either sort of in the middle of the
17. paper or in the front or the back, but it is where the
18. front page is, in the end, part opinion and then I think
19. that is difficult, because the headline is big and the
20. opinion is strong and the news is weak.
21. Q. All right. Could this signposting solution concept be
22. applied right across the press, do you think, right
23. through from broadsheets to tabloid press?
24. A. I don't really see why not. I mean -- and I am not sure
25. there is a hunger for opinionated news, to be honest.
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Leveson Inquiry

25 June 2012

I am not sure people are any better off by having their
own prejudices fulfilled by the paper. Maybe that is
what sells papers. I am not -- I have written lots of
articles for papers, but I don't think I have ever
written an opinionated article. I have written an
opinion for papers and I have written a new story for
papers, but I don't think I've ever written an
opinionated news story for papers. There is a big
distinction.

Q. What about the argument that newspapers are essentially
having to compete in an increasingly competitive field?
They have to compete with broadcasters, increasingly the
Internet, social networking sites, and by providing
opinion in this way, they are actually trying to create
a niche for themselves, which is the only way they can
be survive. Is there any merit in that argument?

A. We're all looking for an identity of one sort of
another, and opinion may well help shape that identity
but, you know, at the end of the day, it seems to me
that you are looking at press standards and it seems to
me one of the standards that has slipped is the
distinction between fact and opinion, and I think that
that is an important and clear distinction, and one that
it would be possible to address in a regulatory form.

Q. Right. Can I ask you now, please, about paragraph 2(c)
of your statement. You explain that over the years --
this is about interaction between politicians and
members of the media and here you are discussing your
own contact. You explain that over the years, you have
regularly intersected with politicians and public
officials over the years but you would guess that you
have known fewer than half a dozen Cabinet ministers
socially and then on entirely appropriate terms. That
begs the question: what are 'entirely appropriate
terms'?

A. Well, I mean, you intersect with people socially
because, as social animal, as you have something
socially in common. But simply because you are a hack
and they are a politician, that I don't think is
necessarily going to produce what I would call
an appropriate social engagement. I mean, we are
talking about a period of over three decades and I would
think it would not be more than three or four
politicians I have ever come to know particularly well.
In one case, for example, I could -- by chance, I met
a senior politician on holiday, and his wife painted and
I paint and so we painted together, and that is where
the friendship came from. So I call that entirely
appropriate. That wasn't because I work on
Channel 4 News and she is married to a Cabinet minister.

Q. All right. Insofar as you have not become socially
friendly with other politicians, is that a moral or
ethical decision or simply something that has arisen?

A. I think it is natural accretion. That is how it works.
I can't honestly say that I lie awake at night longing
for another social engagement with a politician.

Q. Can I ask you to turn now to (g) of your statement. It
is at the top of the third page. This is discussing the
rise of 24-hour television news, together with the
development of internet and social networking. You
explain:

"This has undoubted impacted on what we once
understood as news."

I note that you yourself are a Twitter user and
blogger as well. How do you consider yourself to be
regulated in those spheres, if at all?

A. Well, I mean, technically, legally, we are not regulated
in those spheres, but we have an understanding certainly
in my place of employment, that in a moral sense and in
a sort of quasi-legal sense, we are governed by the same
regulation as Ofcom metes out to us in a television
context, that all the platforms upon which we work we
work essentially to an Ofcom guideline.

But that is something we have established together
in the workplace with our editors. I would say that the
Twitter and the social network aspect is more elastic,
and they are more generous to us in those circumstances.
We are a little more permissive. But I would say that
we still -- you know, we have to remember that that is
who we are. We are essentially impartial operatives and
we can't get out into a huge amount of opinion on that
platform.

Q. Is that because you blog and tweet as "Jon Snow,
presenter of Channel 4 News"; would it be any different
if you were tweeting or blogging as Jon Snow, also
a private individual?

A. Well, I do in fact blog and tweet as "Jon Snow,
Channel 4 News" and I don't have any other outlet, nor
would I, I think, seek to have one. Once you are in a
position like this, it is difficult to say one has
nothing to do with the other. The one can pollute the
other.

Q. Is there anything you would like to say, Mr Snow, about
regulation of these particular spheres, the blogosphere,
social networking and so on; is there anything you would
like to add on this thorny question?

A. I think one could say a lot, but the horse has bolted,
its seems to me. I don't see actually that there is much
that can be done -- and this, in a way, is a huge
challenge to the Inquiry, I suspect, in that it is one
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I think the answer to my question is "no"?

A. "No" is the answer. Sorry, I was a bit verbose.

Q. Not at all. I don't think anyone has come up with a magic solution, in any event.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Thank you.

A. I am sorry.

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: Turning to paragraph 2(h) of your witness statement, please. You explain that in your experience -- I will pass over how long that experience is -- the relationship between Number 10, the government, public bodies and the media has become rather more stage-managed. You explain that access to ministers and public officials has become more tightly controlled. You also explain that in your own experience when you were able to interview politicians in the studio or for a report or even on a doorstep, their willingness to communicate tends to be either because they want to promote a line or the politician or the party is making a rapid effort to shut down or reorientate a troublesome story.

You then go on to discuss Ofcom in this regard. You say you have had concerns about Ofcom being a little Draconian on compliance in news and current affairs. Can you expand a little on that? It is just below that, paragraph 2(h), just below where I have been reading them.

A. Sorry, what exactly ...

Q. You say this. You say: "I have had concerns that Ofcom could be a little Draconian on compliance in news and current affairs." Although obviously you say --

A. I work in both news and current affairs.

Q. Yes.

A. And make documentaries sort of from time to time.

Q. Yes.

A. And the compliance, particularly in documentaries, is very, very burdensome indeed. It doesn't stop you doing what you want to do but you have to dot an awful lot of Is and cross a lot of Ts. I could possibly argue that whilst I admire Ofcom system, I think the compliance stuff has gone too far and that we have to carry out a lot of activities which are beyond the real need.

But on the other hand, it is probably better that way than the other way, but ...

Yes. For example, last year I made a documentary about dodgy doctors and some element of the compliance to do with phraseology and various other things had not apparently been quite right. As a result, we had to reshoot several days of material and that is tough when you have a heavy work schedule and the rest of it. You build in the blocks to do your stuff and then -- so it is there, it is very much there, and it would be wrong to suggest that you could come up with a regulatory system which was as detailed as Ofcom and not think it would affect the working practices of every journalist.

Q. Is that complaint about the fact that you had to ahead and shoot various bits of it again or did the regime stop you from putting out the documentary that you wanted?

A. No, if you want to put the documentary badly enough, you will eventually put it out, though it may be a bit of a shadow of what you originally wanted to put out. I think in this case it seemed to me to be such a small issue that it wasn't really worth bumbling about. It never stops you doing the story but it might stop you doing it in a certain way. That may indeed be the design of some regulation. Who knows?

Q. Can I ask you to go to section 5 of paragraph 5, the fourth page of your statement. This is about elections. Just to draw the contrast, please. We have heard a lot about the role of newspapers in elections. You give us the other side of the coin from the broadcaster's point of view. Can you just tell us, please, why you consider this to be one of the most carefully managed and regulated aspects of your job?

A. Well, until the event of the Internet, clearly General Elections were very ferociously fought in my working lifetime on television. Television was the main platform. Although minds are often made up by the written press, the information and the colour of an election campaign and very often many of the messages were transmitted on television. Television was seen as an increasingly powerful element. Therefore the obligation on television to get it right, certainly on public television, was very, very strong indeed.

I would say that it is the area of our work that probably has the most careful scrutiny when it comes to compliance and to balance, and you are under very considerable balance circumstance. You have to give opposing parties equal access to time, so if you do, one night, a big investigation into some party policy with...
A. There is a present debate going on about whether general elections can be made more exciting and it could be argued they are made less exciting by the degree of regulation that we have to go in for. On the other hand, if the choice is between BBC 10 o'clock and Fox News, I think most people in Britain would rather go for the BBC 10 o'clock news, simply because Fox News has become a major player in the very contest in which they are supposed to be reporting. And that is where we can go, if we want. If we want to get rid of regulation, that is where we will end up.

Q. Turning to paragraph 6 of your statement, please. This is discussing the history of relations between politicians and the media. You said that like many others, you have been astonished by what we have been learning about the relationships of some parts of the media with politicians and public officials. Having listened to this Inquiry, what is it in particular that you have been astonished to hear?

A. Well, I have actually -- I think I should have added the word "guilty" as well, because I think we suspected that this was going on, that the access was as has been described. There were a few moments when one would be staking out Downing Street and you would be aware of the comings and goings of some of the individuals who have figured in this Inquiry. I don't think we ever really asked many questions about what they were doing there and I don't really know why we didn't. I think in some cases we didn't because we thought it might actually be slightly visited upon us. Sometimes if you go nosing around what newspapers are doing, it ends up in some degree of trouble. But I think -- I have been shocked at payments.

I mean, I find payments to public officials beyond my belief. I mean some of it is allegation, isn't it? So one has to be careful.

Q. Yes.

A. I am shocked that there is the strong allegation that there was an attempt to change legislation affecting the commercial interests of a broadcaster -- that would seem to me to be amazing -- in reward for -- in return for support for a particular election campaign. Those sort of things. You know, we used to laugh up our sleeves and say that is what the Italians did. Now we've discovered we do it. It is amazing. I am astonished. One can be cynical as a journalist and say they are at it all the time, but actually I never did think they were at it. I didn't think we were a particularly corrupt society. I have always worked on the basis that there was something a bit better.

Q. Is there anything you would like to say about the future of the relationship between senior -- either editors or proprietors and journalists, given what you have heard, the evidence you have heard at this inquiry?

A. I think as the competition gets fiercer and the terrain changes, it is going to get worse. I think money is now so much a part of things, whether anybody is going to do that, and I will admit that my channel paid Monica Lewinsky to give me the first interview she gave after the shenanigans with Bill Clinton. But I see that really as almost -- that is different. I think the idea that you are paying somebody who is actually paid to get on with a job of work to give you information about that work is -- or to give you access to material that they are able to access through their work is totally unacceptable.

Q. So that is payments?

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I think we have to add, of course, that that is an allegation and we will have to wait and see --

A. Of course, I mention no names.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: We will have to see what happens at the conclusion of the investigation.

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: Absolutely.

You alluded to the comings and goings of individuals at 10 Downing Street --

A. I mean, we can be very clear that we were very well aware of Rupert Murdoch's movements, either at the back of the premises or the front. They tended to veer from one to the other. Not always, but sometimes. And that should have raised a little bit of an alarm bell.

Q. What is it about what you have heard that has astonished you about the access or level of access?
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<td><strong>get worse. I don’t see -- you know, this wasn’t -- when</strong></td>
<td><strong>That must be the fundamental difference. There is no</strong></td>
<td><strong>Q. Can I ask you to pause there. Do you mean by that that</strong></td>
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<td><strong>I started, we had four channels of television, and they</strong></td>
<td><strong>stranglehold of that nature.</strong></td>
<td><strong>it should have the power to go in and enquire after</strong></td>
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<td><strong>were all publicly owned. So now we are in an arena,</strong></td>
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<td><strong>only two decades later, where there are thousands of</strong></td>
<td><strong>A. Yes. I think it should be about maintaining standards,</strong></td>
<td><strong>A. Yes. I think it should be about maintaining standards,</strong></td>
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<td>9 Q. Is there anything that can be done to ensure a level of</td>
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<td>17 Q. Mm-hm.</td>
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<td>18 A. I am very conscious that the in-depth news programmes</td>
<td>11 Q. Right. You then say at the bottom of that paragraph</td>
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<td>22 ministry and saying, &quot;It was all right when I last saw it&quot;,</td>
<td>24 &quot;But [you say] material that has been proven plain wrong has not been matched by a similar size of apology and rectification.&quot;</td>
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<td>23 rather than having to sit down and have a long</td>
<td>24 Can you tell us a little more about that?</td>
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<td>24 discussion about what happened and the rest of it, then</td>
<td>25 A. Well, readers' editors have been around in the United</td>
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<td>25 you are going to go for the former.</td>
<td>States for some time. They have been here now for</td>
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<td>22 Q. No.</td>
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<td>24 such licence to do anything --</td>
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<td>26 A. -- and nor should they have it. If we are going to have</td>
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<td>27 a free press, freedom of speech, then it is healthy that</td>
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<td>But also the corrections column has been absolutely standard practice in the Washington Post, for example, for at least two decades. And I don't see -- what does a newspaper have to lose if it simply has a column saying, &quot;By the way, we called Mrs X Mrs Y; she is in fact Mrs Q&quot; or whatever? There are ways in which you can perfectly easily -- one paragraph, you correct the things that are wrong. The date, whatever it is. Some of these things are relatively small, some are quite big.</td>
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<td>When it comes to apology, I mean, obviously on the basis of gravity of offence, apologies should be as bold as the original assertion, you would think to run a front page in which the typeface was going to be as bold as the original assertion, you would think twice about whether you were going to risk it, because you are just going to look an idiot.</td>
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Day 87 - PM
Leveson Inquiry
25 June 2012

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(+44) 207 404 1400
www.merrillcorp/mls.com
8th Floor 165 Fleet Street
London EC4A 2DY

7 (Pages 25 to 28)
low regard with which people in public life are held and
for the obsession of prying into the private lives of
both ordinary and extraordinary citizens. Indeed, I go
further: I believe the constant undermining of people in
public life may deter many from entering it."
Let me ask you two questions about that. The first
is the last sentiment in that paragraph, about deterring
people from entering it. Do you mean across public life
or are you talking about politicians there?
A. No, I think that in all sorts of areas of public life —
and it’s not just politicians; it could be in terms of
other public roles — people are very often reluctant to
get involved because they don’t want to be part of this
public fray. I do believe that some newspapers have an
agenda for undermining or destroying people who don’t
fit with their particular interests, be they commercial
or ideological, and that the — I mean, you can see it
in as simple a thing as the appointment of the manager
of the England football team. It is very clear that one
or two elements of the press didn’t like the appointment
and lampooned him and sent him up, you know, ruthlessly,
played with the fact that he couldn’t roll his Rs. This
is pointless, absolutely pointless. Whole vast
headlines on the front page of the paper. How does that
encourage people to want to make the extra effort in
Page 29

public life? He is not a politician; he is an England
football manager.
Q. You have probably covered my second question. You say
you criticise the popular written press for obsessional
prying into the private lives of both ordinary and
extraordinary citizens. Can you give us a bit more
detail about why you take that view? Again, do you
limit this to any particular newspapers? Is there any
particular modus operandi that you would criticise?
A. I think two things here. One, if you are a journalist,
you are exposed to other people’s journalism across the
world and I don’t think that there is — on this scale,
I don’t think we have this manifest in any other system.
People point to Bild in Germany, with is a tabloid, but
frankly it is mild by comparison with what goes on here.
France, of course, there are none, but that is partly
because there is a Privacy Act. United States, the
National Inquirer is sold in a different part of the
 shops. I mean, it is not seen as true. I mean, it is
good fun, but — you know, it is crazy.
Here, it is part of the newspaper. This is news.
It is on the same scale as the liberation of Tahrir
Square and the arrival of a Muslim brotherhood president
and all the rest of it. That gets the same treatment as
Mr and Mrs or Ms X and their private life, and so it
Page 30

of the fare, it is part of the staple diet, and I don’t
think it is a diet actually that people really need
even.
It is not a question of suppressing press freedom;
it’s just: why don’t we deal with the important things
in life? And, you know, it is not — it is, as I say,
pernicious and I think at times mendacious. I don’t --
I try to analyse it a lot. I try to see what it is that
makes this worthwhile. Where does it come from? What
role does the editor at Associated Newspapers have in
this? You have heard the atmosphere there can be quite
difficult and I know — and it is something I really
want to say to you, is that Fleet Street, as we still
call it, even though it is nowhere near Fleet Street, is
populated by really decent, good, wonderful journalists.
No question. Every single paper I have ever had any
contact with on Fleet Street has superb people working
for it. But somehow this culture sweeps through and is
allowed to prevail, irrespective of the quality of the
people who try to work there. And it doesn’t happen in
broadcasting, and it is not just because we are
regulated. It is because we don’t see it as any part of
our news function.
For example, in the chitty chatty days before
Diana’s demise, we took it as sort of
Page 31

becomes a very big and destructive thing.
I believe one of the problems about the environment
in which this inquiry is set is that there has been
enormous emphasis on the Murdoch papers, on
News International, and possibly not enough on other
areas of the press. I would say that Associated
Newspapers are at least, if not more pernicious than
anything you see in the News International stable. They
are vying with each other, perhaps, but there is
something more insidious about Associated Newspapers and
very possibly they will go after me for saying so. But
I believe they have an agenda for trying to undermine or
wreck the careers of individual people in public life,
and I think that is unhealthy. I think people should
stand or fall by what they achieve or fail to achieve in
the job they are employed to do. It is of no interest
that they have — unless it is in some way in conflict
with their actual responsibility. But if it was found
that the a Archbishop of Canterbury was — and God rest
our souls that he would never be found here, but just
supposing he was frequenting Soho or something. That
would obviously have some clear public interest.
But I’m afraid to say this goes way beyond anything
like that, where people who have a quite modest,
perhaps, role in public life are undermined. It is part
Page 32

8 (Pages 29 to 32)
Day 87 - PM

Leveson Inquiry

25 June 2012

Almost self-denying ordnance. We said, "Look, who she is dating, what she is doing is not really our business. If some news development occurs, there is some mélée or something and she is in danger, then we will report it, but fundamentally her private life is not an issue for this programme."

Then, of course, she died, and she became a massive interest and we had to talk about people we had never talked about before, somebody called Dodi Al Fayed, et cetera. These people had to be resurrected.

But in my view, this is the great need, is for this area either to be divorced from our understanding of news and placed somewhere else, maybe in a brown paper bag under the shelf, but for it to appear as being mainstream news is incredibly destructive. I think people get a distorted view of the world in which we all function.

After all, Britain is made up mainly by people who live by the law, do their best -- politicians, workers, people in the health service. These are the people who make this country work and simply demonising them, exposing them for some human frailty, is, I think, very destrctive.

Q. Mr Snow, thank you very much. Those are all my questions. The judge obviously may have some questions.

Page 33

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: No, Mr Snow, thank you very much.

A. Thank you, sir.

(THE WITNESS WITHDREW FROM THE WITNESS BOX)

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: I don't know whether you wanted to take an early break before the next witness or whether...

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: We will take a break now and then come back. Thank you.

(3.00 pm)

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Then on 29 May, your solicitors were informed by email that the Inquiry wanted you to give oral evidence today.

A. That's correct.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: And that is all before 13 June.

A. Yes.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: And anybody wanting to research the article that they wish to write about how I was going to call you specifically to deal with this article could easily have found those facts out by asking you, couldn't they?

A. They could have done.

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: Thank you very much.

Now, can we just touch upon, please, your career history, first of all. This is set out at paragraph 1 of your statement. I will summarise it. You have been a journalist, you tell us, since 1974. You have also worked at the Sunday newspaper. You explain you joined the lobby in 1983 with the Sun; what role did you hold then?

A. I was lobby correspondent on the Sun.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: And that is all before 13 June.

A. Yes.

Q. Have I accurately summarised the position?

A. Yes, you have.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Mr Walters, contrary to everybody's expectation over the last week, I have no intention of asking you any questions about the article in the Mail on Sunday of 17 June, but there is some nonsense I would like to deal with, if you don't mind.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Because, just so we have elaborated it, you received a section 21 notice, I think on 5 April. On 23 April, you provided a response in a statement which, as you have just confirmed, is dated 20 April.

A. That is not the case, sir.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Because, just so we have elaborated it, you received a section 21 notice, I think on 5 April. On 23 April, you provided a response in a statement which, as you have just confirmed, is dated 20 April.

A. (WITNESS NODES)

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Then on 29 May, your solicitors were informed by email that the Inquiry wanted you to give oral evidence today.

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LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: And on 31 May, you agreed to do that.

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A. I was lobby correspondent on the Sun.

Q. You tell us you have also been political editor and deputy editor of the Sunday Express but that you have now been the political editor of the Mail on Sunday since 1999?

A. That's correct.

Q. Have I accurately summarised the position?

A. Yes, you have.

Q. Thank you. Again, given your extensive experience, can we start with the way the relationship between politicians and journalists has changed over the years you have been in political journalism, please. You deal with this topic at paragraph 7 onwards of your statement. You deal with a number of changes: first,
greater transparency over the years; secondly, changes to Downing Street lobby briefings. You also look at the changes to the role of press officers and the new use of spin doctors and so on.

I am going to take you through those in a little detail, if I can, the first of which is transparency, greater transparency. At paragraph 8, you explain that in essence, in the past, politicians were more likely to be viewed as members of the ruling class and the media was expected to know its place, but now the public expect more openness and newspapers have developed a similar approach in response, yes?

A. Yes.

Q. Others have said, Mr Walters, that in fact this new approach has now gone too far to the other extreme. The politicians are now regarded with some what some would say deep cynicism and hostility and it has also been said by witnesses today, in fact, that this approach of newspapers can in some situations actually put people off going into politics; is there any validity in those assertions, in your view?

A. I don't think there is any shortage of people putting themselves forward to be Members of Parliament and it is true that there is a greater degree of transparency these days but I think that's a good and healthy thing in the main.

Q. Let's just deal with them in turn. The first proposition I put to you is that politicians are now regarded in some quarters with deep cynicism and hostility; would you agree that there is any validity in that particular view?

A. I think there probably is but I think that's more to do with the expenses affair than anything else that's happened in the press. Clearly, that did have a major effect on public opinion. Aside from that, has the public's view of politicians changed greatly over the years? Probably not massively, no. I think they have probably always been fairly sceptical about politicians.

Q. The second aspect I asked you about is whether this put people off going into politics. You have told us that you don't think there is any shortage of people wanting to go into politics, but can you see the argument that if politicians and, in particular, their private lives are scrutinised carefully, that might put off some people from going into politics? Can you see that argument?

A. Well, I don't know whether it has or hasn't, but there are lots of people willing to be Members of Parliament and I am not sure I would go along with that argument. As I say, I think the expenses affair had a big effect.

Q. Others have said that newspapers have done this, have
blurred the line between news and comment, because it is in increasing competition with others, ie newspapers have to perform a different role in order to survive, essentially, and this is what they do; they provide more opinion, blurred in with the news that they are reporting.

A. Mm-hm.

Q. Now, let's consider it in this way. First of all, do you accept that over the years you have been a journalist, there has been an increasing blurring of the line between straight news and comment.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. That is something that factors into the decisions that you make when you are writing your articles, does it?

A. Yes.

Q. Of course.

A. I mean, I became a general news reporter when I first entered journalism after leaving school and I continue to regard myself as a news reporter. My specialism is politics but it could be any other, and I am not sure that I have ever written an opinion column. In fact, in the Mail on Sunday, we more or less had a -- I have not written any political opinion pieces. I stick to political reporting of news stories. I approach all news stories in exactly the same way; attempt to find out the facts, go to each side or all relevant parties, and to quote all sides of the story. So I regard myself as a news reporter. My specialism is political reporting.

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benefit system. The headline from the article you've 
written -- and I apologise; I can't find it 
immediately -- uses the word "feckless". It says 
"Mr Cameron removes benefit from the feckless 
under-25s"; yes? Do you remember that headline?

A. You haven't shown me this article and I don't know 
whether that's online or the newspaper.

Q. I will endeavour to find it and we can discuss it. But 
again, there is no reference to the word "feckless "in 
Mr Cameron's speech.

I understand you also conducted an interview with 
Mr Cameron set out in that article, which makes no 
reference to the word "feckless". Again, can you 
understand -- and I will show you the article in due 
course, in order to be fair -- that inserting the word 
"feckless", again, introduces a degree of comment or 
opinion into the article?

A. Well, I haven't written anything about his speech, 
because the speech was on Monday. What I have -- what 
I did do, I interviewed the Prime Minister and that 
article appeared in the paper.

Q. Yes.

A. And -- but the use of the word "feckless" -- in fact, in 
our article, we went out of our way to make it clear 
that not everyone on the housing benefit under-25 was 
going to be deprived of the benefit but there would be 
certain exceptions.

Q. I understand.

A. And in addition, in the article, there was a very strong 
comment from a Labour official, saying they were opposed 
to this and talking about the damaging effects they 
thought it would have. So I think we went to pretty 
great lengths to make a fair piece, even in the context of 
it being an interview with the Prime Minister. As to 
calling them "feckless" -- I mean, by his remarks, he 
repeatedly talked about irresponsible behaviour and 
I think for the newspaper to describe that as him 
talking about feckless people is not particularly 
unfair.

Q. I understand.

A. I think it reflects exactly what he meant.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Can I just ask --

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: Of course.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I have not seen this, but this is 
only today. So you don't know what the headline is 
today?

A. Well, I write for the Mail on Sunday, sir.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I see.

A. I don't know whether you are referring to an article in 
the Daily Mail about his speech or something else.

A. Yes.

Q. I know it's on the Mail Online website but it appears 
with your name on it. Forget the headline for the 
moment. That would suggest that you wrote the article?

A. I did, yes.

Q. The first line of it is:

"Radical new welfare cuts targeting feckless couples 
who have children and expect to live on state handouts 
will be proposed by David Cameron tomorrow."

Do you see that?

A. Yes.

Q. So the word "feckless" appears in the article as well as 
in the headline.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. But you would say overall the article is a fair and 
balanced one and the use of words "feckless" doesn't 
undermine that general principle?

A. I don't think it does because it is absolutely clear 
that is what the Prime Minister is referring to.

Q. Thank you very much. So generally speaking, then, you 
don't think there is a particular problem with the 
blurring of news and comment in general terms and you 
personally don't see any problem with the way in which 
you write your articles. You think that there is 
compliance with the relevant parts of the editor's code
...ie repeating the Downing Street line on any given issue."
3. You say for a government that makes sense, because they can keep political control over what is being said.
4. You say it could be argued that that is not in the public interest.
5. The one change that you say you could do is to give back to Whitehall departments the autonomy they once had. Is that a suggestion that you would seriously put forward, or is that something you think is aspirational?
6. A. Yes.
7. Q. You explain that the number of press spokesmen or people employed as press spokesmen or political advisers has increased. You tell us at paragraphs 21 to 22 that particularly during Mr Blair's government much energy was devoted to ensuring that all departments were "on message", you say in inverted commas:
8. So I think it is a very big myth. There is nothing really happening at lobby briefings, other than an on-the-record briefing and a lot of journalists like me, Sunday journalists, don't go anyway.
9. A. Yes.
10. Q. No changes that you would propose?
11. A. No, I don't think so. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
12. I have heard vague suggestions of all sorts of other ideas which all sound rather cumbersome, because to be a member of the lobby really all it means is you are accredited to report from the Houses of Parliament. That is really all it means. In many ways it is self-policing, because if you misbehave or you betray confidences or you write stories that are regularly inaccurate you will soon be found out and you will not survive very long.
13. Q. Okay. The third change you identify is the change in the roll of press officers and the introduction of spin doctors?
14. A. Yes.
15. Q. Okay. Moving on then to the second change that you have identified, please. Witness statement paragraph 15 onwards. Downing Street lobby briefings. You have explained that in the time you have been a political journalist, lobby briefings have changed considerably. They used to be very secretive, you tell us. You tell us that there was no disclosure even that they were happening at one stage. It was a very closed world as well, you also explained.
16. Number 10 website, as I understand it, and there has been greater openness. Then, at paragraph 18, you say: "There are pros and cons to this. Greater openness is welcome. But journalists are always in search of new information of interest to readers or viewers. If by making briefings public Downing Street is more cautious, journalists will go elsewhere in search of new information."
17. A. Yes.
18. Q. I guess that would mean you wouldn't propose any changes to the current system in order to ensure there is no further blurring of that line; that follows?
19. A. Well, I don't accept that there is an enormous blurring, not by my newspaper, no.
20. Q. Okay. I play virtually no part -- I never go to a lobby briefing for many, many years. And the lobby -- it did used to be ridiculously secretive. Now it is very open and the briefings are all published online. I think anyone can go to the morning briefings.
21. I think anyone who writes for a Sunday newspaper that doesn't really apply. So I don't think I have been to a lobby briefing for many, many years. And the lobby -- it did used to be ridiculously secretive. Now it is very open and the briefings are all published online.
and to suppress things that might be embarrassing to the
government.

Q. Is that a change we just have to live with, or is there
something that could be done?

A. I think it is something you have to live with. But in
my experience dealing as a reporter at the sharp end of
all this, it is simply a reminder that in an age of mass
communication that when the message is so important that
if a government gets too much power over that message,
it can present a danger itself.

Q. I then wish to ask you about your own relationship with
politicians. You deal with this at paragraph 24 onwards
of your statement. You explain that like most political
journalists you entertain politicians at the company's
expense on an occasional basis for lunch or tea or
drinks, although by far the majority of your contacts
would be just conversations or on the phone, and you
explain that this is to get them to know them better and
to build a relationship and vice versa.

Now, how important is it to you, as a political
journalist, to be able to have that interaction with
politicians without interference, and by "interference"
I mean the imposition of rules or the requirement to
keep a careful note of everything that is said in such
a conversation?

A. Well, it is the most important part of my job, because
my job is obtaining information, reporting what is going
on in government and Parliament, and for the most part
that information comes from individuals: politicians or
officials or others. If you want to get that kind of
information you have to build a relationship of trust
with people. This is simply the way of doing it, by
talking to people.

Q. What about socialising with politicians, do you do that,
or is contact limited to occasional lunch?

A. I don’t -- I prefer not to socialise out of work with
politicians. The only minister who I have been personal
friends with was Mo Mowlem. Since she is no longer
here, I don’t mind talking about it. But that was only
because she showed a particular interest in my -- I had
a handicapped daughter and she showed a great interest
in her. So yes, she came to mine and I went to hers and
she came to my daughter’s funeral. But outside that
I don’t socialise with politicians for the most part.

Q. Is that because you see inherent risks in that?

A. Yes, it is, because there are risks in it. If you
become -- well, I think it is the same in any
profession, really. If you -- there is -- that kind of
blurring is a danger and if you become personally
friendly with a politician then, of course, it is going
to make it more difficult for you to report what they
are up to, if they have done something that they
shouldn’t be doing, if you’ve become close personal
friends. I think it is best to avoid it if you can.

Q. All right. You also explain -- in fact, the way you put
it is that you say that you:

"... do not socialise with politicians or officials
outside of work hours. That way risks are minimised and
managed."

When you do meet with politicians in your day-to-day
interactions, what is it you think they are seeking from
you? I know you have told us what you are seeking from
them, information and so on --

A. Probably to promote their reputation. But I am well
aware of that. If you -- they might want to tell you
about some policy they have got or some other piece of
information, and obviously you have to take into account
what their motives might be. But there is only one
yardstick that I would apply to it, and that is whether
it is factual or not, whether it is publishable, and
whether it should be published.

Yes, I do -- I am aware of what their motives might
or might not be, and would make an allowance for that in
assessing whether or not it is worth pursuing.

Q. Can I ask you about one step up, ie the relationship
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between proprietors and politicians, or even editors and
politicians. You deal with this at paragraph 31 onwards
of your statement. You explain that -- you say this,
I will read it out:

"Tony Blair’s decision to court News International
led to a very close relationship in which Downing Street
gave privileged information to News International, and
in return News International supported the Government on
certain issues, for example the Iraq war."

That is a bold statement to make; what information
do you have that supports that assertion?

A. Well, I know people who were involved in that flow of
information. I am not going to say who they were. But
it was an open secret that Downing Street could more or
less pick up the phone and dictate an article in certain
News International journals. It was well known in the
lobby.

Q. In return for support on certain issues?

A. Well, the amount of support that they gave them in that
period was pretty obvious, because it was obvious in
their editorials. What other support they may or may
not have given them, I am not privy to that. But
I think we can work it out for yourselves.

Q. I understand you don't want to name any individuals, but
can you give us detail on what issues -- well, you say

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<td>All right. Paragraph 34, please, of your statement.</td>
<td>One of the most beneficial effects of recent events, you tell us, is that politicians and media are more likely to remain at arm's length, and you say that essentially it is in the public interests for politicians and media not to be too close?</td>
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<td>I think what I meant was it is not perfect.</td>
<td>The current system isn't perfect -- I will use your new phrase, as opposed to &quot;flawed&quot; -- the best way of doing things is to essentially uphold the laws as they exist now?</td>
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<td>I did say the question was optional.</td>
<td>Well, I am sure there are ways it could be improved.</td>
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<td>I think there was something you wanted to add in respect of that story?</td>
<td>But I can't say I have my own recipe or formula to do so. All I would say is that I think going down the state road has great dangers.</td>
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<td>Finally, paragraph 42 onwards, please. You say:</td>
<td>The power of the Downing Street media machine was formidable in the early years of the Blair government.</td>
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<td>You give us an example in 2002 where you filed a report describing how Downing Street had sought a bigger role for Mr Blair in the Queen Mother's Lying in State in Westminster Hall.</td>
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<td>You tell us that Downing Street said that was untrue and the Prime Minister complained to the PCC. Actually then what happened was a senior official who actually had knowledge of what had happened threatened to speak publicly that the Mail on Sunday report was accurate. Downing Street relented and then the PM withdrew his complaint. You say if that hadn't happened there would have been serious consequences for your newspaper and for you professionally, even though the incident itself was of little consequence.</td>
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<td>You tell us that Downing Street put in a complaint to the PCC and the Spectator, the Standard and Mail on Sunday, owned by the media groups who weren't necessarily taking the Downing Street line, and the Spectator and the Standard published partial reports of the incident to start with. Downing Street put in a complaint to the PCC and Black Rod was effectively lent on to give a semi denial of those stories which Mr Campbell referred to. Black Rod himself said in his statement to the PCC it was a very narrow denial and he said to them &quot;Don't push this any further because I am not prepared to lie and we both know that it is fundamentally true&quot;.</td>
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Then what happened was the Mail on Sunday investigated this story, established the true version, published it. We then had the Downing Street complain to the PCC about us and it was only because of the courage of Black Rod, who was prepared to defy them, and was prepared to go public and make a statement on the matter, saying that -- I think you have probably seen the statement. He talks about constant phone calls, sustained pressure, even on the day that the coffin arrived at Westminster Number 10 asked for a greater role for the Prime Minister.

It was only because he was prepared to make a public statement that Downing Street backed down.

Now, had he not done that it would have been catastrophic for all three publications, the editors and me as well, and I just think it is an example of actually the PCC was actually quite effective in actually acting as a mediator between the various sides.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I think I have heard a fair amount of evidence on this story, haven't I, and seen various numbers of the document.

MS PATRY-HOSKINS: Yes. I just wanted to give Mr Walters the opportunity to say what he had to say about this.

Q. Does that conclude what you wanted to say?

A. Yes.

1 Q. I didn't want to interrupt.
2 Mr Walters, those are all my questions. I am very aware that I didn't manage to find the hard copy of the article relating to Mr Cameron's welfare benefit reform.
3 I will ensure you are provided with a copy, and if it is acceptable to Lord Justice Leveson, if there is any --
4 LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: We can deal with headlines in this way: I have been aware throughout the Inquiry that reporters don't write the headlines. I entirely understand the system. But one of the concerns that have been repeatedly expressed to me has been the discordance between careful analysis of the facts and the headlines.
5 I am sure you are aware of the point, because it has been made by a large number of the witnesses who have given evidence before me. That is why I wondered and asked you specifically about a headline, that you were after all the political editor, not, as it were, a cub reporter who can leave it to their elders and betters.
6 I am just wondering whether you have anything to say about this potential discordance between headlines and articles.
7 A. Yes, I think headlines have to be treated with extreme care, and on a big story I would normally expect to be consulted on a headline that was going on one of my stories.
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