

Blair: Lessons from Leveson – ‘It’s a waste of time’ (Part Two)

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Politician v Journalist

If you accept the premise that there’s something wrong with the balance of power between politicians and media what do you do about it?

This was what Lord Leveson asked former Prime Minister Tony Blair at the end of his lengthy and largely unrevelatory evidence.

The answer is that there’s little you can do without instituting the kind of regulatory regime that governs broadcasting and compels TV and Radio journalists to achieve a reasonable proportion in their coverage of party politics.

This is why [Craig Oliver had such as go at the BBC’s Norman Smith in Downing Street](#). The exchange became infamous because it was caught on camera, but it is routine. That is because it works. The BBC and other broadcasters know that in the end they have to satisfy the politicians that they report fairly. Do you want your newspapers to have similar responsibilities?



Press Pasty Power

Whatever you think, their proprietors don’t. And they are the people who put the money in. In a free society it’s generally accepted they should be allowed to push their point of view. It can be argued that is what the punters want. Compare our press with other countries and it looks more partisan and often more petulant, aggressive, and disproportionate, even deceitful, destructive and dubious at times. But it excites people about politics and, in the case of pasty taxes and intelligence secrecy and MPs’ expenses, it can achieve healthy political results.

The fact is that there is little Leveson can do to bring in reforms to curb the excesses in political coverage. Yes, he can set up a sensible independent watchdog with real teeth to curb the lies, bullying and invasions of privacy in ordinary people’s lives. But he can’t legislate to make newspapers less partisan and aggressive about politics. Leveson is having a lovely debate about politics and the media but it ain’t gonna change much, if anything. It is as much up to politicians as the regulators to reform that relationship.

I repeat. Leveson could set up the new PCC tomorrow. The rest of this inquiry, compelling as it is for media analysts like me, is largely a waste of time. It increasingly feels like a work of history. Newspapers are

declining, their culture is in retreat. Set up a new regulator and let’s get back to work.

[The first part of this blog where I look at Blair’s evidence on political media is [here](#)]

[For excellent detailed analysis of the Leveson Inquiry with a diversity of expert and practitioner opinion, please visit

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