

Polis – Trial by media?

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Media observation of the laws on contempt is slipping into grey areas. Coverage of the McCanns over the last year has appeared to cross boundaries and at times has been highly prejudicial, but they have not faced charges. Now similar disregard for media law seems to be evident in the taloid [coverage](#) of Karen Matthews who faces [charges](#) in relation to the alleged abduction of school-girl Shannon Matthews.



[Janet Street Porter](#) has written a passionate [piece](#) which asks whether this woman can ever get a fair trial. And she also asks whether the vilification of Karen Matthews is selective and unfair:

The point is that with a bit of ferreting almost every family in the land could unearth broken marriages, children born out of wedlock, babies given up for adoption and a handful of relatives with criminal records. Show me a family tree that would pass detailed inspection by the Daily Mail and I'll try to find an MP that's never fiddled their expenses.

Street-Porter also makes the point that the current government is hardly setting a moral lead on this:

What kind of role models do politicians offer to people like Karen? The Prime Minister talks of understanding the problems of the poor, getting people back to work and off the dole. But the man who promised the end of spin spends as much as his predecessor on special advisers to groom his public persona – the kind of experts that Karen Matthews could clearly benefit from. Jennifer Moses, formerly of Goldman Sachs, advises the Prime Minister on poverty but is one of those non-domiciled people who pay a relatively small amount of tax compared to their vast wealth. The Government should make it compulsory for all its team to pay all their tax in the UK, to set a decent example to the rest of us. But it doesn't. Benefit cheating? Is it any worse than cleverly exploiting loopholes to pay the minimum amount of tax you can get away with?

Polis is holding legal seminars on contempt in the contemporary news media environment: contact us at polis@lse.ac.uk for details.

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