

Leveson Editorials: What do the papers think about the future of the PCC?

The eve of the Leveson report has found newspapers launching a last minute bid to prevent “statutory regulation” of the press. Editorials published in the last week prior to the report’s release reveal an increasingly recalcitrant sector that is resigned on the need for reform—following gross misconduct by some of its members—but is also resolute in its desire for continued self-regulation.

Leading articles by the [Independent](#) and [The Times](#) in this period reiterated earlier calls for a ‘middle way’ solution, in the form of a new independent regulator with the power to investigate, fine, and issue prompt redress to citizens aggrieved by the press. Indeed, while some major newspapers have cautiously withheld their signatures from Lord Hunt’s letter to Leveson, their opinion pieces have expressed naked support for the PCC chair’s proposal.

More interesting, however, is the palpable fear of politicians gaining power over the press. Reacting to the letter submitted by 42 Conservative MPs arguing for statutory underpinnings, the [Daily Telegraph](#) **warned** that such moves could easily influence the Prime Minister’s response to the Leveson report. Waving the same red flag, both [The Guardian](#) and [Times](#)’ editor James Harding **cautioned** that legal controls could give politicians moral responsibility for the press, who would have to negotiate their conduct and content with the same people they want to hold to account.

These panic-stricken statements have been largely motivated by suspicions that Lord Leveson will indeed recommend statutory backstops for the press, if only to compel its members to join the new regulatory body, as [The Independent](#), [The Guardian](#) and the [Daily Mail](#) have predicted. Amidst fierce lobbying by anti- and pro-statutory camps, newspapers, which have previously refrained both from forecasting the results of the Inquiry and passing hasty judgment on it, have been more upfront about their own biases. Earlier this month, the [Daily Telegraph](#) **attacked Leveson** for chilling free speech, asserting that papers have since become reluctant to pursue controversial stories of public interest. More appeasing was the [Daily Mail](#) which, while **acknowledging** that the British press has indeed allowed its standards to slip, also points to this newfound restraint as a sign that the industry has changed its ways. Echoing this reassurance, [The Times](#)—which this month has gone as far as to criticise [News of the World](#) for losing its moral bearings—insist that misbehaviour is still a rarity for the press industry.

That little attention has been paid to phone hacking victims or the collusion of press with politicians and the police further reveal newspapers’ current preoccupation with their own future—a partiality which doesn’t help an industry that has repeatedly proclaimed itself a protector of public interest. Indeed, sensing a ‘partisan and self-righteous onslaught’ against Leveson, the [Guardian](#) pointedly called for a more nuanced and reasonable debate on the issue, summing up a realisation that has been running through newspaper editorials all month: whether or not the Inquiry recommends more legal controls, it has already succeeded in getting the press to want to regulate themselves better.

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