

# Vans, bans and publish and be damned

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There are sometimes reasons why as a journalist you can't always broadcast or print everything you know. You may feel that it will endanger someone's life or perhaps that you don't know all the facts and so might get things drastically out of context. But generally one should publish and be damned. And every single government would say that they agree with the idea of free speech – but look what they do in practice. Last night there was a bizarre exchange between the lawyers for the British Government's top lawyer – the Attorney General – and the legal team for the Guardian newspaper. The Guardian had obtained evidence of a 'document' which appears to make interesting reading for the police investigating the so-called 'cash for honours' inquiry. I won't bore you with the details of the story. Suffice to say that it now has almost nothing to do with the original allegations of corruption. Instead it is now about whether the government has tried to hide the truth from the public and the police. Their reaction last night in trying to get an injunction against the Guardian was indicative of the mess that they are in. At one point they even asked whether the delivery vans for the Guardian could be turned around. This is reminiscent of the farce when the Thatcher Government tried to ban the MI5 memories 'Spycatcher' in the UK even when they had been published elsewhere. When governments are in trouble they seek to suppress. The Blair administration was built on adept media management. In its final days the danger is that the message of petty political corruption is being trumpeted as much by its own actions as that of the media.

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