

**SECOND SUBMISSION TO THE LEVESON INQUIRY**

**FROM ALASTAIR CAMPBELL**

April 30 2012

**INTRODUCTION/MY ROLE**

1. Thank you for your letter asking me to provide a second statement to the Inquiry. As your letter states, I did touch upon some of the issues likely to be raised in Module 3 in my statement for Module 1, so this statement should be read in conjunction with that one. In some instances I have repeated or developed points I made in my first statement, and I have also included as an appendix to this statement those passages from my first statement which may be thought relevant to Module 3. I have sought to answer the questions in your letter, but have not been limited by them.
  
2. Prior to working for Tony Blair, I was a journalist, mainly with the Mirror Group, and mainly covering politics. At the time of John Smith's death in the summer of 1994, when Mr Blair became Labour leader and asked me to work for him, I was assistant editor at Today, then owned by News International. I joined Mr Blair's team as his press secretary shortly after he became Leader. I was part of his political and election strategy team and responsible for managing his media relations. When he became Prime Minister, I became the government's chief press secretary and his official spokesman. This involved co-ordinating government communications, acting as an advisor to the PM and his colleagues on strategy, and briefing the media, mainly in the twice daily formal briefings, as well as individually. In 2001, I became director of communications and strategy, and sought to pull back from day to day briefing of the media. I resigned in 2003, in between my two evidence sessions to the Hutton Inquiry. I had been seeking to resign for some time, in part for family reasons, and

also because of my own frustrations at the nature of what the media had become, and my relations with it. I stayed in touch with the PM as an advisor including returning for the 2005 election campaign as Labour's director of communications, and during the transition to Gordon Brown as Prime Minister, whom I also advised on a part-time basis prior to the 2010 election.

### **WHY MEDIA RELATIONS WERE CHANGING**

3. I began working for Mr Blair at a time the media age, including via the changes I set out in my first statement, was becoming a reality. It was clear to me that in this new media age, any high-profile individual or organisation that did not have a modern communications function able to adapt to these changes would be at a considerable disadvantage in seeking to meet core objectives. This is particularly so in the case of politics, where change is not all about legislation, but is also about public opinion, and the development and winning of important arguments over time. From the vantage point of Opposition, I could see that the government communications systems were not serving John Major's government well, which is something we were able to exploit, and I knew we would have to make changes if we were elected. We would be taking office with a major programme of reform, for which even though we might have a mandate, we would continue to need to build and win the arguments needed to take those reforms forward, and with the media developing as it was, that was going to require modernised communications and a more strategic approach to how government puts its case to the public. I would point to areas as varied as the economy, devolution, NHS spending, the Northern Ireland peace process, public-private partnerships, the gay rights agenda, welfare changes, the minimum wage, the

New Deal as issues where at times the communication of strategic arguments over time was an important part of the broader political and legislative process.

#### **WHY LABOUR NEEDED TO CHANGE**

4. Both as a journalist, and as a Labour supporter, I was very conscious of the damage that had been done to successive Labour leaders by a hostile press dominated by right wing commercial and political interests. This was not a new phenomenon. Beaverbrook and others used their papers as instruments of political power, as Rupert Murdoch, The Barclays, Paul Dacre and others do today. Nye Bevan bore the scars from a hostile press when seeking to establish the NHS in the face of pretty vicious opposition. But the damage to Labour was particularly strong during the Thatcher era, which coincided with my time as a political journalist on the only paper actively and aggressively committed to supporting Labour, the Mirror. Mrs Thatcher could count very heavily on the support of a majority of newspapers, notably the Sun, the Mail, the Express, the Telegraph and the Times, and their Sunday counterparts. Several owners and editors were rewarded for their support with peerages and knighthoods, a practice which as I said in my earlier statement would be viewed by many Britons as corrupt if applied in other countries. Lord Stevens at the Express was given a peerage. Sir John Junor (Sunday Express), Sir Nicholas Lloyd (Daily Express), Sir Larry Lamb (Sun), Sir David English (Mail) and others were honoured for 'services to journalism'. The truth is they were honoured as much for the zeal with which they supported the Tory Party. One of the changes we made to the honours system in 1997 was a rule that no serving editor should be knighted. The papers concerned did not just actively support the Thatcher government. The tabloids in particular did all they could to undermine and often misrepresent the Labour Opposition, especially under

Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. It may well be that even with a fair press, they would not have been elected; that is something we will never know. What we do know is that the press they received was hugely biased against them, and in favour of Mrs Thatcher and her Party. Michael Foot had long been derided by the right wing media for perceived political and personal shortcomings, the most famous being the alleged disrespect he showed in attending the 1981 Remembrance Sunday Service in what was mythologised as a 'donkey jacket.' But that was but part of a long campaign during which in several papers Mr Foot could only be defined negatively. According to the book, *Stick it up your Punter*, the Sun and the Express told freelance photographers covering a Foot visit not to bother sending pictures of the Labour leader 'unless falling over, shot or talking to Militants.' The Daily Mail, under a pre-knighted David English, led a front page with a disputed claim that Nissan would 'scrap plans for a £50m car plant' if Labour won the election. '35000 jobs lost if Foot wins' screamed the headline. I cite this as a typical rather than exceptional example. Labour's defeat in 1979, and a seeming shift to the left, ignited not so much political debate as focus on sinister Marxist forces, wrongly ensuring that at times in the public debate Labour's political doctrine was indistinguishable from the Communists'. The Express earned top marks from Tory Central Office with a 'Spot the Trots' feature of 70 'extremist' candidates, among them Neil Kinnock and Robin Cook.

5. Once Neil Kinnock became leader, the bias of the press was something I wrote about from time to time, including in a piece for the *New Statesman* about the way Mrs Thatcher's Number 10, the Reagan White House and the UK press conspired to trash Mr Kinnock on a visit to Washington. The headline was 'you guys are the pits'. The only stories that were allowed in several of the papers had to be focused on 'gaffes,

rebuff, humiliation.’ This followed a pattern on previous overseas visits. The blitz on Mr Kinnock, even more vicious than with Michael Foot, marked the era of the use of personality politics with the press often leading the way, and politicians coming in behind. The right-wing tabloids also led the way in seeking to make his wife – ‘Glenys the Menace’ – an issue. Headlines like ‘Kinnock – I back loonies’ (The Sun) were again the norm rather than the exception, culminating in ‘Nightmare on Kinnock Street’ shortly before the 1992 general election. The point is that political campaigns are part and parcel of the history of newspapers down the years, but the change around this time was that even more than in the past, they really didn’t let the facts get in the way of the story. Campaigns, strategically directed from Central Office, on themes like ‘reds under the bed’ and ‘loony left councils’ had a real and enduring impact, often based upon stories that turned out not to be true.

6. So even before working for Mr Blair, I was under no illusions about the potential political power of the right wing press in particular, and the need to counter its influence if we were to be electorally successful, and able in government to communicate the reality of the reform programme. I am not sure if it can be claimed, as the Sun did after the Tories won in 1992, that 'it was the Sun wot won it,' but there is no doubt in my mind that the systematic undermining of Labour and its leader and policies through these papers, actively encouraged and fed with lines of attack by Tory HQ, was a factor in Labour's inability properly to connect with the public, and ultimate defeat.

#### **CHANGING THE TERMS OF LABOUR’S MEDIA RELATIONS**

7. In taking on the role asked of me by Mr Blair, I set myself the objective of ensuring that he did not suffer a similar fate as a result of ingrained media bias in this changing landscape. That meant taking a more strategic and more proactive approach to communication and to Labour's relations with the media. In government, it is possible to make decisions which have a direct impact upon people's lives, and which then allow the public to decide whether the government is good or bad for their lives and livelihoods. In Opposition, this is not possible. What you communicate and how you communicate will be fundamental to your success or failure. If you allow your opponents or the media to dictate the terms of that communication, failure is more likely than success. But the reason we won in 1997 was far more than a question of improved communications: much more important than what we said to the media was what we did, the overall vision Tony Blair and his colleagues put forward, and above all the changes made, for example to Labour's constitution and a number of key policies. New Labour was the strategy and our communications flowed from the political and strategic decisions we took. Part of our purpose was to show the public that we understood the reasons for successive defeats, that we knew we had to change, that we wanted to change, that the change was real, and in showing the public we could change the Party we hoped to win their trust to be elected with a mandate to change the country. 'New Labour New Britain' became the focus for all our communications. So though the media was always important, especially in Opposition, it was less important than the basic strategic decisions we took. Once they were taken, however, public awareness, understanding and support were important, and the media an important vehicle for communication.

8. Part of the approach of New Labour, therefore, was to state very clearly that we wished to engage much more with the media. In addition to the historic bias against Labour, the Wapping dispute had given rise to real bitterness between parts of the media and the Labour Party, to the extent that the Party did not communicate with, for example, some of the Murdoch titles. Also other titles like the Mail and the Express were so supportive of the Tories, and hostile to Labour, that our people tended to avoid them. We changed that approach very deliberately. Part of our message was that there was no part of public opinion we were afraid of and where we would not take the basic arguments of New Labour.

#### **A NEUTRALISATION STRATEGY**

9. When we set out in 1994, I would define the overall objective vis a vis the press as being to neutralise their impact so that we had for the first time a reasonably level playing field. We ended up doing better than that. The Sun endorsed us at the start of the 1997 election campaign. Other papers normally hostile to Labour curbed some of their natural excesses. Again, I do not believe the papers swung the result, though they may have helped increase the majority because of the sense of momentum we were able to gather. I believe The Sun backed us because they knew we were going to win: we did not win because they backed us. But it is certainly the case that we very deliberately set out to get our voice and our arguments heard in papers normally hostile to us, and this had the positive political impact we sought. We continued to do interviews and articles for papers traditionally supportive of Labour, but we made every bit as much effort to be heard in papers normally hostile to us. When for example Rupert Murdoch invited Tony Blair to speak to his senior editors and executives from around the world, at a conference in Australia, I was of the view he

should accept. First, because it was an important platform. Second, because the controversy of accepting would ensure major coverage of his speech, a statement of the basic New Labour case. And third, it would allow us to pursue the neutralisation strategy I mention above with regard to one of the media's most important influences. It allowed us too, as I record in my diaries, to witness the extent to which Mr Murdoch himself would set the tone his papers adopted.

### **WHY PRINT MEDIA REMAINS IMPORTANT IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

10. As to why the print media continues to matter in a TV and internet age, I would say that in the UK, more than in other advanced democracies, the print media continues to have a disproportionate impact on the broadcast media. In terms of direct opinion forming, the broadcast media is probably more important, and more trusted, than the press. But the prism through which it views news tends to be set by the papers. As soon as the front pages are printed, they are discussed by the broadcasters. They often set the tone for broader debates. Witness the way the debate on welfare tends to focus on 'scroungers' rather than genuinely needy recipients, or the negativity surrounding politics and how that translates right across the media, compared with other countries in Europe; or how industrial action is almost always reported from the point of view of disruption rather than the case those taking the action may have. These are trends born of years of press reporting through an established and generally right-wing prism. Often the broadcast media acts as an echo chamber for that day's papers.
  
11. We were sometimes criticised by the broadcasters for trailing speeches in the press on the morning of an event, a practice continued by politicians today. Our experience

was that if we did not do so, we were less likely to get coverage on the main news bulletins. The public have a right to know what their leaders are doing and governments have a duty to communicate. But often what we considered to be important policy statements would go under-reported whereas anything with scandal or personality attached to it would rage on for days and weeks in the papers, and the broadcasters would follow that agenda. The papers in Britain are not lacking in confidence. They blow their own trumpets very loudly. They are hard to ignore if several are shouting the same issue from the front page. That definitely has an impact on the broadcasters, and part explains why communicators continue, despite papers' falling sales and the impact of the internet, to focus much of their time and efforts on the print media.

12. When the papers set the agenda, it tends to be more negative. The coverage of David Cameron is instructive in this regard. In the early days of his government, the print media was largely favourable towards him. The broadcast media tended to echo that. The print media coverage in recent weeks has become more negative, and that too is now echoed by the broadcast media. Of course some of the new negativity results from continuing economic problems and the mishandling of the Budget. However, another factor in my view is revenge at his having, reluctantly and under considerable public and political pressure, set up this Inquiry. Similarly I think some of the negativity surrounding Ed Miliband is the result of the strong stance he took on phone-hacking. Indeed, all three main party leaders are currently the subject of widespread negativity, and that may well be in part because of the so-called Fourth Estate's collective anger at positions on the press taken by them. I think so far as Mr Cameron and Mr Miliband are concerned, a mirror of these factors may be at play in the remarkable shift of opinion made by some of Mr Murdoch's titles on the issue of

Scottish nationalism and independence. Once fiercely pro-Union, the Scottish Sun now acts as something of a cheerleader for Alex Salmond, who was made The Times' Man of the Year, and who is the object of considerable praise on twitter from Mr Murdoch himself. He may have been 'humbled' by his appearance in front of a select committee as a result of the phone-hacking scandal, but he is still very conscious of his potential political clout in important debates.

**WHY GOOD MEDIA-POLITICS RELATIONS ARE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST**

Good relations between politicians and media are in the public interest because for most members of the public, it will be via the media that they gain knowledge of, and access to, the politicians and the decisions they make. I do not see any inherent or overwhelming risks in this provided people are open and transparent and accepting of each other's roles, and provided policy is not in any way traded for support. I do not believe we did this. Though The Sun endorsed us in three successive elections for example, they were in the main critical of our approach to Europe and on the economy, welfare and public services they tended to come at us from a very right wing perspective. So even if they endorsed us at elections in 1997, 2001 and 2005, in between times there were many disagreements. Indeed, before and after the decision by the Sun to back Labour, there were vigorous internal discussions going on with a vociferous group lobbying Mr Murdoch to support the Tories, who finally got their way in 2010.

13. There is not a political leader alive who would not rather have newspapers broadly support him rather than tear him apart. Read any serious biography of any major political leader in history, and at least part of the story is likely to be their relationship with the media, and their relative success and failure in winning media support for their policies and arguments. So it was certainly in our interest to get newspapers to back us. On occasion we might meet their interests with rhetoric - for example in an article Mr Blair wrote in The Sun shortly before the 1997 election about our commitment to a referendum on the euro. It was made clear to me by the editor that if Mr Blair were to emphasise the point that there would be no entry into the euro without a specific referendum on the issue, and that he understood people's fears about a so-called European superstate, it was likely to be the final piece of the jigsaw before Mr Murdoch agreed the paper would back Labour. As the referendum was official policy, this was purely then a question of rhetoric. But I do not believe he strayed from his basic beliefs because of pressure from papers, or his desire to win their support. I wrote in my diary: 'I called Stuart Higgins [editor of The Sun] and he said, clearly having spoken to Murdoch, that if we gave them a piece on Europe, saying the kind of things he'd said the last time they met, they would put it on the front. I spoke to TB and after we chewed it over, we agreed to go for it. TB felt it could be the last thing needed to swing The Sun round. So did I. We agreed it was important not in any sense to change the policy, but in tone to allow them to put over the message that TB was not some kind of caricature euro-fanatic. It was fantastically irritating on one level that we had to go through these kind of routines, but with an election looming, we would be daft not to try it.' The Sun ran the piece the following morning, and the next day, as the election campaign proper started, splashed with 'The Sun Backs Blair.' With regard to the Hayman Island speech, I would emphasise

that it was very much Mr Blair's voice, not theirs. Indeed my diary for that event records that we were concerned not to be seen to be pandering, and as a result strengthened the arguments in favour of the basic New Labour message, and against the right wing worldview of the Murdoch titles.

14. Looking at this issue of media messaging from a slightly different angle, if we take one of our better known slogans 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime,' perhaps in an interview with the Mirror or the Guardian, one might focus on the causes of crime, whilst with one of the right wing papers the focus might be more on the toughness on crime. However, once a politician reaches the height of leadership of a major Party, all communications are exposed to immediate scrutiny across the spectrum so in a sense there is rightly no hiding from the views one holds. They have to be clear and lack of clarity gets punished.

#### **FAILURE TO ACT RE THE PRESS**

15. I think the public interest is only endangered when the politician, to keep or secure support from parts of the media, makes decisions which he believes run counter to his actual assessment of the public or national interest. Ironically, the only area where I believe we may have fallen foul of this relates to the area of the press itself. I think the current government may have similarly fallen foul, not least in its handling of the scandals that led to this Inquiry, and its resistance to having one for fear of upsetting media interests, or exacerbating political problems caused by closeness to News International and the hiring of Andy Coulson. I believe that Michael Gove's speech to the Parliamentary Press Gallery, in which he spoke of the 'chilling' effect the Inquiry was having on press freedom, may have been part of a broader political strategy to ensure his Party does not further lose media support on the back of any changes made

to systems of regulation and ownership. It suggested to me that even now, there is a clear risk of political self-interest being placed ahead of the public interest, which has to be the rebuilding of trust in press, politics, and the relationship of both to the public.

16. As I said in my first statement, I was of the view when we were in government that we should have done something to address concerns about what the media culture was becoming. Mr Blair shared much of my analysis but he was of the view that the public, who were constantly being told we had the press in our pocket, would not understand if we added press regulation to the legislative load. He also believed that because of the universally hostile reaction it was likely to provoke in the media, it would risk drowning out other more important parts of the agenda. He was further of the view that whereas it is possible to fight and win elections, and to govern with consent, with some of the media offside, to seek to do so with all of them offside, and in kill mode, is very difficult indeed.

You draw attention in your letter to a statement from Peter Mandelson, in which he offers a different interpretation, and suggests there was no issue of principle or priority for the Prime Minister at the time. As I will say in a moment, I don't agree with that. But first I would like to deal with his observation that it is a matter of regret that the only action in relation to the media for which we will be remembered was 'going to war' (his words not mine) with the BBC over Iraq. First, as this Inquiry and many books and academic treatises on the subject have shown, whilst our dispute with the BBC was difficult and very high profile, it is not the only issue for which the media-politics relations of that period are remembered. The debate about so-called spin had been raging in parts of the media for years. Second, I think it is important to

restate that the allegations made by a BBC reporter with regard to the September 2002 Weapons of Mass Destruction dossier on Iraq were of a different order and magnitude to the many false stories we put up with, and were required to rebut in the Number 10 briefings, the whole time. We were accused of inserting false intelligence into a dossier presented by the PM to Parliament, knowing it to be false, against the wishes of the intelligence agencies. I fail to see how we could have done anything other than hit back hard at such allegations which, if true, would have led not just to my demise but, more importantly, that of the PM. It is indeed a source of regret that the dispute with the BBC escalated to the extent that it did, with the terrible consequences it had, but I do not think we could have ignored this.

17. On the second part of his statement I think it was at least in part the case that the PM did not believe press reform merited government attention ahead of all the other issues we had to deal with, and which the public had elected the Labour government he led to address. I do think therefore there was an issue of priority. I think Peter Mandelson may have a point though in saying that the PM felt cowed. Mr Blair did say to me many times, as I say above, that for a politician to take on the entirety of the press, at a time most of the public felt we got an ok deal, was politically not sensible. I think he too had a point, but the failure to tackle the problem was one of the few things we disagreed about.

18. Nor should it be imagined that the PM was under pressure from his colleagues to act on this, with the possible exception of John Prescott, who never disguised his very negative view of much of the press, and at times of our relations with them. But as Philip Gould said in his recently updated book, *The Unfinished Revolution*, I was something of a lone voice in saying we needed to do something. And I do accept that the politics were not straightforward. The PM was entirely justified in weighing up

political considerations, such as the fact that some of the papers – both left wing and right wing - were regularly engaged in a tone of coverage aimed at suggesting he make way for Gordon Brown. To have had all of the papers on such a tack might have undermined him even more, in addition to getting more of the right wing papers more vehemently behind the Conservative Party, again with serious potential political consequences. Even if these were not overwhelming considerations, they were legitimate political considerations for a political leader to make, though I continued to argue against them.

### **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPPOSITION AND GOVERNMENT/CHANGES**

#### **WE MADE**

19. Government and incumbency put Prime Ministers at a considerable advantage to Leaders of the Opposition. I think that when we came to office in 1997, for the first year or so we continued to rely too much on the mindset and some of the methods of Opposition whereas government requires a different and more strategic approach. We made changes fairly early on but we paid a price throughout our time in government for the failure immediately to change approach. Indeed, even the admission that we should have adapted more quickly has often wrongly been spun by journalists as some kind of admission that what media-politics relations became was ‘all our fault.’ I should emphasise here the point I made in my first statement: that when I was a journalist we were not even allowed to say the PM's spokesman existed. A journalist was once upbraided by Number 10 for quoting a ‘Prime Minister’s spokesman’ comment about Humphrey the Cat. ‘Sources close to the PM’ was as close as one could go. At the time some journalists boycotted the lobby briefings because they saw them as part of an opaque closed shop which went against the spirit of honest

communications and good journalism. I did not boycott the briefings, which were an important source of information, but I was very conscious of their flaws, and the bizarre institutionalised dishonesty that was perpetrated on the public every day, in that Downing Street was getting widespread coverage for what the Prime Minister's press secretary was saying, but the public was not allowed to know that he was the source, and journalists risked expulsion from this inner circle if they were to reveal him as such. How this system was tolerated and defended by political journalists, whereas the attempts at openness and transparency I list below were defined as spin, underlines what an odd media culture prevailed at Westminster.

20. In 1997, I made a number of changes after a review of government communications, including on the record briefings, in which anything I said could be attributed to 'the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman', and the establishment of a Strategic Communications Unit to strengthen government co-ordination and discipline in communications. This second change, which followed the Mountfield Review of which I was a member, was in part born of the ease with which we had exploited government weaknesses from opposition. The Mountfield Review had been established by the Cabinet Secretary Sir Robin Butler, who accepted that the Government Information Service (which we renamed the Government Information and Communications Service) was not meeting the requirements of a modern media age. We legislated for Freedom of Information, which had some positive benefits, but whose overall effectiveness was undermined by its use by media to submit often trivial and time-consuming requests for information which took up civil service time and money and which has also had the unwelcome effect of discouraging the commitment of thought to print. In addition to putting briefings on the record for the first time, we put accounts of them immediately on the Number 10 website. I opened

the briefings up to journalists outside the Westminster lobby. We built up our contacts with the specialist, regional and ethnic minority media. Of course to some extent this was designed to be of benefit to us, in that we were seeking to engage the media and the public beyond the Westminster village, with its focus on process and personality, but it was also about acknowledging in the media age that an old style system of nudge and wink and background briefing was no longer sensible or right. These changes were followed some years later by a decision that the PM himself should be the first to appear at select committees and should do a monthly press conference, and that on occasion ministers rather than a spokesman should do the main government briefing of the day. Unfortunately by this time the focus on 'spin' was such that any attempt we made to improve media discourse tended to be dismissed as spin. Nick Robinson of the BBC once said that to be fair to me [AC] the press conferences were a genuine attempt to improve discourse but that 'the PM became so good at them, they became boring.' Therein lies an interesting insight - that news is only news, even from a Prime Minister, if he says something deemed by the media to be off message or embarrassing, as opposed to what he intended to communicate in calling the press conference in the first place.

21. **THE REAL SPIN DOCTORS ARE THE JOURNALISTS**

I have said before that the vast bulk of spin, if by that we mean interpretation and massaging of fact as opposed to fact itself, comes from journalists not spokesmen. The overwhelming majority of the words I spoke to journalists were delivered in on the record briefings. Every word could be reported and analysed and often they were. Even when I did one on one briefings - a lot less often than people might imagine

from the reputation given to us by the press, and more of them with broadcasters with ever-moving deadlines than print journalists - I assumed that I was on the record.

22. The focus on spin was part of a power struggle that developed once our honeymoon was over. Under Margaret Thatcher, the papers were given a sense of power by their proximity to it, and by their being made to feel they were part of her team. Several of them turned against John Major, and some turned in favour of us. But whereas initially I believe they rather admired the way we set the agenda, I think eventually they came to resent this. The line developed that what we did was spin, what they did was honest communication and commentary. They were trying to set themselves up as the sole arbiter of the public interest and the political agenda. There was also a specific problem with the make-up and culture of the lobby system, in which accredited political correspondents had special access to Parliament and, for briefings, to Downing Street. Again, my view was in part born of my direct experience as a journalist. There were and are some excellent political reporters, but there were two problems that had a particular impact upon the way the political debate developed: one was a herd mentality, something that was encouraged by the old system; the other was that many papers and broadcasters had specialist correspondents who did policy, which often left the lobby reporter to focus more on the pure politics, and the inevitable focus on personality, who's up who's down. In trying to open up the system, the biggest resistance came from some of the lobby journalists themselves. The politics and personalities are not without importance, but on many issues – and this applies to the current government as well – much of the media debate from Westminster focuses on politics and personality to the exclusion of really engaging debate about policy that will directly affect people's lives. I would point to the recent debate on the NHS and Social Care Bill. It had enormous coverage, but I would not be

surprised if most members of the public had little actual knowledge of what changes the Bill has brought in, because so much of the print and broadcast coverage was about the personalities involved.

23. Equally, some of our biggest difficulties came in issues related to science and public health. Genetically modified food became another issue where it was virtually impossible to have a sensible debate conducted through the media. Indeed, anything to do with food scares was an area where twin media interest in undermining government and provoking fear were all too often irresistible. An Express editorial at the time of BSE, for example: ‘Most people have lost faith in experts and politicians when it comes to public health. Statements meant to reassure create confusion and despair instead... In the end we can rely only upon our own commonsense.’ Yet if ever a food scare was real, it was the politicians and experts who would get it in the neck. This encouragement to disbelieve the words of politicians and scientists had in my view direct impact in the creation of health problems, the coverage of the MMR vaccine issue, and the impact on take-up and subsequent measles outbreaks, being perhaps the most obvious. There has been no accountability at all for the role of the press in fuelling a situation which led directly to serious ill health for children.

#### **ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

24. Election campaigns are a time during which politics and political debate tend to dominate the media. Campaigns are won and lost over years not weeks, but the official campaigns themselves are important and all the parties fight to set the agenda. Ultimately however the media will to a large extent decide the agenda, in that they will decide what leads bulletins, what leads papers, what subjects are chosen for interviews, phone-ins and the like, and therefore what will dominate the national

conversation. It is much easier for the parties to influence that if they are able to shape the news agenda, and that is not just a question of policy. Come a campaign, and certainly once the manifestoes are published, policy is all out there. Dominating the agenda becomes more a question of how well you frame arguments. If you do so in a way that the press focus on your arguments as opposed to those of your opponents, dominance of the agenda becomes possible, and of course that is easier if more papers are predisposed to hear you because they have taken a position on the outcome of the election. I am not hugely persuaded that newspapers urging their readers to vote one way or another actually makes as much of a difference as they think. Had that been the determining factor in 2010, David Cameron would have won by a landslide. What does make a difference is if, during the build-up to a campaign and the campaign itself, the centre of gravity of the main debates is shifted by the way the press sets the terms of those debates. This is very different to, say, France or Germany, where although newspapers may have an editorial line, it tends to be separated from comment, so that the politicians, even in editorially hostile papers, do tend to get their main points heard; or those parts of the press in the United States who employ fact-checkers to verify the quotes and attribution in stories written by their journalists, a system which if employed here would see some very large gaps in the newspapers, particularly at weekends.

25. During an election campaign, contacts with the media tend to be stepped up for obvious reasons, though by 2001 I was very much in the director of comms role, much more than being a hands-on media manager. I was by then very firmly of the view that a more strategic approach was required. The fact that we won a landslide, even though our manifesto launch was drowned out by - all on the same day - the PM being harangued by a member of the public outside a hospital, Home Secretary Jack

Straw being slow handclapped by the Police Federation, and John Prescott thumping a voter who attacked him with an egg, underlined that. In other words, it is possible to take too seriously the day to day ups and downs of the media debate. Politicians who stay focused and strategic will be more successful, even surrounded by all the media noise. That is not to say it is an easy thing to do. It is not, but it is the best approach to take.

### **NEWSPAPERS AND 'POWER'**

26. So although David Cameron did not secure a majority, despite majority support across the media, it is not unreasonable to apply the word 'power', as well as 'influence' to the newspapers, collectively and individually; though my own assessment is that they have more influence on the terms of debate than actual power to dictate policy. They only have power if politicians let them have power, and I believe one of the problems of recent times has been a failure of the political class – for good reasons and bad – to stand up for itself against the barrage of negativity. The good reason would be basic beliefs in freedom of the press. The bad would be the kind of patronage system operated by Mrs Thatcher, or the privileged access governments of both colours allowed, and the efforts made to win media support.
27. Within the media world, there is a sense of a hierarchy as to where power lies. Rupert Murdoch is the most powerful media owner. Paul Dacre is probably the most powerful newspaper editor, partly because of the commercial success over which he has presided, including the adaptation to the advent of the internet, and also because of his longevity and his reputation within the industry. The truth is that some papers do matter more than others. We are back to the nexus between print and broadcast media. If the FT leads on a big business story, it is likely to get more pick up from the

broadcasters than if it was in another broadsheet. If the Mail leads on a story, it will get more pick up than if the same story is in the Express or the Star. In recent times, not least because they have marketed themselves cleverly as having a political voice, The Sun will get more pick up than the Mirror. The Guardian will get more pick up than the Independent.

28. My observation about unaccountable political power stems from the points I made about the way the papers had seen their role change in the face of 24-7 TV news and the internet. Papers can get noticed through great stories, of course. But they can also get noticed through taking strong positions. This might be on an issue - again Europe springs to mind. This is something I referred to in my first statement. This is one area where the force and nature of the debate in the media made it very difficult to have a reasonable and rational debate with the British public about a serious issue central to Britain's future success. The Euroscepticism as advanced by papers like The Sun and the Mail is expressed largely in terms of nationalism, that Britain is not European in its history and culture, that Europe is a plot being waged against us by the French and the Germans. Nothing that suggested the European Union may have had a role in delivering peace and prosperity was ever allowed to intrude on that line of attack. Tony Blair was often attacked as failing to understand history in his approach to Europe. I would argue that it was and is the Eurosceptics' distorted and selective view of history that led to a fundamentally dishonest debate, again often based on stories which turned out not to be true, some of which I listed in my first statement. Similar approaches on immigration (bad) and multiculturalism (bad) skew the terms of public debate. There was an interesting example when Mail Online ran an article headlined 'More than two-thirds of young British Muslims believe "honour violence" is acceptable, survey reveals.' It stated 'most young British Muslims support violence

against women who “dishonour” their families, a Panorama investigation will claim today.’ In fact, Panorama claimed no such thing. What the ComRes survey actually showed was that six per cent of young Asians agreed that violence to a family member was acceptable if he/she dishonoured the family. The article failed to point out that 8per cent of Christians agreed with that statement. The totally misleading headline was probably based on the finding that two-thirds of young Asians believed families should live according to the concept of honour. Again, I cite this as a non-exceptional example.

### **PERSONAL CAMPAIGNS**

29. During the Major era, the press enjoyed the claiming of several ministerial scalps. Once a newspaper decides to run a campaign to force someone from their job, then nothing positive may be said, no positive story run about that person. I mentioned The Sun’s coverage of Kenneth Clarke. There were several of these during our time - Charlie Falconer, Steve Byers, Tessa Jowell, David Blunkett, Beverley Hughes, to name a few. We saw most of them off. In some instances, the Prime Minister decided a minister should resign, or the minister decided to resign. But the campaigns being run are an attempt to exercise a form of power. Newspapers know they can set an agenda and they see it increasingly as what they have to do to be noticed and maintain a place in the media firmament. It has always been a part of a newspaper's role, and should not always be seen as a negative, but I would argue this has increased in the last decade and that for many, the other factors I mentioned in my first statement are contaminating their approach to truth – notably the culture of negativity, and whether something is true counting less than impact.

**LESSONS TO LEARN**

30. You ask what lessons can be learned and what changes might be made in relation to media-politics relations. To be frank, one of the reasons I left in 2003 was that I had run out of ideas, and felt that it was virtually impossible to have a sensible debate with the media about how we might address the diminution in trust between politics and media, with the subsequent negative impact upon public debate and engagement in politics. Unless we put our hands up and proclaimed that it was ‘all our fault,’ (which would have meant saying something we did not believe) then much of the media was not really prepared to listen. We wanted a two-way debate. They – or at least the noisiest among them – wanted it one way. Whilst accepting there was in part a political self interest at work in wanting to get relations on a better footing, I did also believe that our politics, the quality of our democracy, and therefore our country were being damaged by what had become an atmosphere of mistrust and at times mutual loathing. The changes I refer to above were part of our effort to change this. But if I am being frank, this had little impact for the better.
31. The media like to blame us for the changes in culture. The argument goes something like this - that in days gone by, politicians all told the unvarnished truth, spin doctors did not exist, but since Peter Mandelson and I came along, the press have been spun and bullied and manipulated, and as a result have had to become more and more negative as a way of fighting back. It is nonsense. As Tory MP Nicholas Soames once said to me 'do you think my grandfather [Winston Churchill] didn't have a spin doctor - of course he did!' The real change from that era has been the change to a very different media culture, very different working practices, and above all perhaps technological change which has delivered a new speed and intensity to the media, to

which politics and government have had to adapt and respond. Others in the media, more reasonably, like to say that it was a case of six of one, half a dozen of the other, that the blame should be equally shared between press and politics. I don't accept that. Whilst I accept that at times we may have sought to be too controlling, in general terms I think we made changes which were a minimum needed to modernise government communications in the media age. It might be helpful if the Inquiry looked at a random selection of accounts of the many hundred of Number 10 briefings I did. First, to see the sheer volume of issues and stories we were dealing with, and expected to be on top of, every day. Second, to see how much time and energy was required to deal with stories that often turned out to be wrong. Third, to show how rarely we slipped up in terms of factual error. And fourth, to show the scale of access the media had on a twice daily basis, every word on the record.

**NEW REGULATION NEEDED, BUT REGULATION ALONE WILL NOT CHANGE CULTURE**

32. Nobody should wish to curb the freedom of the press to inform, educate and entertain and, crucially, to hold the powerful to account. And in a free press, the kind of phenomenon I am talking about above, where newspapers adopt very strong and legitimately held positions, is not one that can or even should be solved easily by regulation or legislation. But the problems which have led finally to this Inquiry are about more than phone-hacking: they are cultural, and the challenge must be how to balance basic freedoms for a robust and questioning media with commitments to high standards and accountability for the media owners, journalists, and editors, possibly the last part of our national life subject to no real accountability at all.

33. If we accept that they are able to exercise a form of power, then as with other forms of power that should be an accountable power. Editors like to say they are accountable every day when the customer decides whether to buy the product or not. But the customer does not always know the agenda of the owner, the editor or the journalist, or the extent to which truth and story selection are twisted to suit it.
34. This is a very difficult area in which to regulate. The aim is not to prevent the media having strong views which they express freely. Indeed, that is something to be encouraged. The aim of any change, including regulation, should be twofold: first, to provide a framework for the media to stay within accepted bounds of conduct in their dealings with individuals and organisations; and second for there to be transparency about particular commercial or political or even personal motives which may be affecting the content of press reporting and comment.
35. In relation to the first aim, there should be standards of honesty, integrity, compliance with the law, respecting people's privacy and confidentiality, not intruding unduly into personal tragedy or grief, set out in a Code promulgated by a Regulator; which should be enforceable against editors, journalists, and owners by the Regulator who must be substantially separate from the media, and separate from the State. That body should operate like for example the lawyers' professional regulating bodies, in enforcing professional standards by investigation and individual sanctions. Such a body, as the lawyers' bodies do, should enforce standards but in the context of seeing their role as also preserving the independence and integrity of their own profession. A press regulator with such power of individual sanction but truly independent of the media and government would not in my view 'chill' investigations. Just as with the legal profession, it would ensure proper standards. Legal regulation has not led to a cowed

legal profession in this country. Rather the legal profession is made much stronger by having well-recognised, accepted and enforced standards.

36. As to the second aim, namely to provide transparency over what is or may be motivating individual media outlets, it is difficult to envisage any form of regulation enforceable by sanction which could effectively enforce transparency without being unduly interventionist in the affairs of a media outlet. But there needs to be greater openness and transparency and thereby accountability about the power they have and the way they wield it. The PCC as originally constituted is on the way out. Perhaps a new Regulator can, in addition to investigating and sanctioning owners, editors or journalists for specific breaches of a Code as set out above in connection with the first aim, also have the power, as it sees fit, to publish reports, from time to time, on the extent to which papers operate as instruments of power; the extent to which they abide by a code which binds them at least to accuracy in the presentation of 'fact'; the extent to which they are fair and reasonable in their reporting; and the extent to which they are being sufficiently transparent in the interests which are driving their content.

37. So for example News International's reporting of and editorial line about the BBC may be influenced by the fact that NI has a substantial stake in Sky TV. Or the reporting of police and crime matters by NI might have been affected by the relationships between the Metropolitan Police and journalists and editors in the NI stable. Or the reporting of the aborted BskyB deal may have been influenced by one side's desire for the deal to happen, and the desire of rival media organisations to stop it. Or the reporting of a political issue may be influenced by a paper's overall political stance. The way a newspaper reports stories on the BBC, the police, business deals or

politics per se is most certainly not a matter for a Regulator's sanction. But there is no effective and reliable means in this country for there to be convincing exposure of the interests which drive the media, and those who lead and write and report for it; or the extent to which the motivation and interests of the owners, editors or journalists is distorting what they seek to present as objective coverage. The media itself will often expose the commercial and personal motivations of the politicians or the bankers or the other groups which influence public life. Not so in respect of their own - the Guardian's relentless pursuit of the phone-hacking story has been a rare example of a newspaper properly investigating another newspaper. A Regulator with the power to investigate and report so as to reveal the standards and motivations either of a sector within the media or a media group or an individual outlet would be a worthwhile tool in seeking to deliver a significant change in the current position where the media is inappropriately free from a true examination of its motives and practices.

38. As in all industries, the leadership is key. It is why I am suspicious, for all I believe in a free press, of the current efforts by the new chairman of the PCC to have one last crack at self-regulation devoid of any Parliamentary oversight or underpinning. Surely what delivering this second aim is about is ensuring that the principles of transparency, openness and accountability – which the media rightly demand in relation to all other aspects of public life – are also applied in some way to them. It would be neither possible nor right to have an enforceable standard which says all newspapers should be objective. It should not be a matter of criticism if a paper is right or left wing, pro or anti Europe, pro or anti a government's economic policies. But it should be possible for the public to be better informed of what the motives of owners and editors are, and the pressures their journalists may therefore be under. We

know something of the commercial pressures on some MPs and peers from declaration of interests. Freedom of Information has opened up at least partial accounts of meetings of State officials. And when it comes to public office, there is a never ending running commentary on the alleged motives and performance of public servants, particularly senior politicians.

39. The culture/behaviour being examined by the Inquiry is not simply bad behaviour on individual occasions (undue intrusion/breach of privacy/inaccuracy/hacking etc). In the case of those incidents there is little argument about the need for a Regulator who can hold individual journalists and media outlets to account. The wider issue is where the individual paper or owner, editor or journalist is not necessarily guilty of an individual breach of some behaviour code, but where they use their power for some goal which is not apparent – personal preferment, the promotion of other commercial gains, the pursuit of a political agenda, staying on the right side of a government or political party to get more stories – and that motivation then leads to a distortion of the way issues are described and reported. If, for example, a paper repeatedly distorts the facts in support of a political goal, whilst there should be no means of stopping the paper from reporting in that way, there is value in some respected body pointing out that is what is happening.

40. As a result of this Inquiry, the public has learned, and will continue to learn things about the media, and its relations with the police and politics it did not know before. That is a good thing, especially if it helps lead to a change in culture. But the principles of openness, transparency and accountability should apply at all times, not just in times of a crisis provoked by the specific issue of phone-hacking. That is why

it may be right that the PCC's replacement could have the power to mount and conduct its own investigations, including having the power to see documents and interview individuals, as this Inquiry has done, both as a way of driving up standards of conduct and of keeping the public regularly informed about the workings of an important and influential part of our culture.

### **LORD HUNT'S PROPOSALS**

41. Even if I trust the motives and good faith of Lord Hunt, I am much less sure about the motives and good faith of current owners and editors whose main hope is that if they can get one more drink in the last chance saloon, they are home and dry – and they are thinking if they can get home and dry after all the scandals that led to this Inquiry, they will be home and dry for good. Nor am I persuaded that the examples Lord Hunt has cited of good self-regulation bear much examination. Take the Premier League: its members cannot opt out of the Premier League without risking their own success or even survival as football clubs. It is not clear why or how a newspaper would be disadvantaged from staying outside Lord Hunt's proposed system. It is dependent upon goodwill and good faith which may be present now, with the Inquiry taking place, but can quickly evaporate once a new self-regulatory system is in place. Nor is it clear yet what financial sanctions are being proposed for breach of contract between publisher and Regulator. Nor is it clear what happens if a publisher considers a judgement to be wrong, a fine to be unjust, and launches a legal process that will presumably put financial burdens on other publishers who are funding the Regulator. These are basic questions which as yet appear to have no answers. Lord Hunt has admitted that the system is dependent on everyone agreeing to sign up to it. So was the last one.

42. There are examples of regulators established by Parliament but then allowed to operate independently of political or commercial interests. Looking once more at the area of lawyers, the Legal Services Board, brought into being by the Legal Services Act 2007, is an interesting addition to the regulatory field, a statutory body regulating other self-regulating bodies.
43. This is not an area in which I have expertise but one might look at the Solicitors' Regulatory Authority, the Financial Services Authority, Ofcom, Ofwat, Ofsted, the Office of Fair Trading, the Food Standards Agency. It is perfectly possible to have systems of regulation and accountability which carry the authority that government and Parliament can confer, but in their operations are independent of government, Parliament and commercial vested interests. So among the potential flaws in Lord Hunt's proposal are: the extent to which the papers are under no meaningful obligation to adhere to the system to which they sign up, the lack of real detail about how the proposed contracts would work in practice, about sanctions and remedies or accountability, the fear that the industry would in any event manage to water the contracts down once general agreement was reached and followed by detailed negotiation, the failure to deal with what has become known as the Desmond problem (a problem likelier to materialise, one would have thought, if the system in theory is intended to be tougher). In addition, I support the view expressed by the Hacked Off campaign that too many of the elements of what are being presented as a new system are familiar from the old one: the funding via PresBof (a fundamental architectural flaw in the PCC), the Editors' Code and committee, the methods and constitution of the PCC. I was surprised to learn that the main driver of the process to select a new chairman was Guy Black, one of the former directors of the failed PCC, and now a

senior executive at the Telegraph, someone with a clear vested interest in ensuring the new PCC does not differ too wildly from the old one

44. When Lord Hunt asked to see me recently to discuss his proposal, he said that he passionately believed in the freedom of the press. Essentially he trusted the press to self-regulate more than he trusted Parliament not to interfere unreasonably with that freedom. Having been on both the media and political sides of the fence, I take an opposing view. I don't trust the current leadership of the newspaper industry, key architects of the proposed new system, to self-regulate, whereas I believe many MPs would take a fair and reasonable judgement about how press regulation set up thereafter to become independent of politics might work. The history of newspapers in the UK is littered with last chance saloons, scandals which lead to reviews and then to one final final go at self-regulation. Once the last chance is secured, the reversion to old habits takes place fairly quickly. Any reading of history would predict exactly such a course if self-regulation is attempted once more.

45. **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRINT AND OTHER MEDIA**

You ask if I would differentiate between the press and other parts of the media. The main difference is the existence of a Regulator in relation to broadcast media. I have never met a TV or radio journalist who has complained of not being able to do his job properly because they are covered by a Regulator. Indeed, one of the reasons broadcast journalists perhaps enjoy greater trust levels than the print media is that the public is aware of the existence of regulation, and the broadcast media's general respect of its systems. The PCC has never enjoyed similar public confidence. Just as the arguments about spin are largely self-serving from the media's perspective, so is the argument that any kind of tough regulation of the press is some kind of assault on

free speech. Since the Inquiry began, across the press there has been an attempt to equate any tough regulation, or involvement of Parliament, with the undermining of a free press. The relative success of Ofcom as a regulator in my view undermines their argument.

46. **MY CONTACTS WITH PROPRIETORS AND JOURNALISTS**

On my contacts with media - with regard to proprietors I would have very little contact independent of Tony Blair. So I certainly attended some meetings with proprietors, though I think my diaries show these to have been fairly infrequent. I do not recall meeting Rupert Murdoch alone, except in the margins of a meeting with Mr Blair, or the Barclays, or Lord Rothermere. I may have attended one or two of the News International receptions without Mr Blair. I also attended Rebekah Wade's first wedding party, and her second wedding, which had media and political figures from across the spectrum, and saw her socially from time to time, including with her first husband. My diaries suggest the Sun editor with whom I had the most frequent contact was Stuart Higgins, when we were in Opposition. The only time I recall meeting Rothermere was at a dinner with the PM and Mrs Blair, at which Rothermere's wife complained at the way Express newspapers intruded on their privacy, an irony lost on all but her and her husband. I did meet Richard Desmond from time to time after he took over the Express titles, and we did discuss his papers' political stance, including when they switched to the Tories, which he said was the editors' not his decision. I met Sir Victor Blank occasionally. I did have some meetings with Les Hinton. I had regular discussions with editors from most main titles and broadcasters, dependent upon what was happening in news terms. Sometimes this would be to brief them. Sometimes to discuss ideas for interviews and articles. Sometimes it would be at their request. It was often useful to be able to talk to the

editors because they would have an interesting take on us, what we were doing etc. They were also an often valuable source of information, eg about the other parties or other parts of the political and national life. These discussions would often cover policy, personnel and, in some instances, the political stance of the paper. The Sun editors for example were usually keen to let us know what Mr Murdoch's thinking might be on an issue. Together with the PM's diary team, I would also ensure that over a given period he would have some sort of contact with all of the main media organisations, either in the form of interviews, private chats, taking them on a visit, very occasionally perhaps a lunch or dinner.

47. Most of my own contacts with the media took the form of the on the record briefings.

In addition to those, on some days I would have no other media contact at all. On some days I might chat to a few journalists and editors by phone. Very occasionally I might see them for lunch or dinner. This was fairly rare however. I was inundated with requests for lunch and dinner and I turned most of them down because my diary tended to be dependent on the Prime Minister's.

48. Most of my media contacts were in the public domain because they stemmed from my briefings, an account of which was published. In addition, on overseas trips, my briefings were transcribed so they could be circulated around government and media unable to accompany us. Other meetings were not put in the public domain. There was no particular reason for this, other than the fact it had never been done and given a fair part of my job related to media relations, it would have added a layer of unneeded bureaucracy if every contact by me or my team with every journalist were logged. I would however not have been embarrassed had all my meetings with media

been made public.

**RUPERT MURDOCH**

49. The comment of Paul Keating you refer to came when he was with us at Hayman Island, the venue for the Murdoch executives' conference in Australia I mentioned earlier. Mr Keating was a considerable support to us at the time. As I recall his basic approach, it was that it is hard enough for Labour parties to win elections and it is even harder if you have the press ranged against you. So he supported our efforts to neutralise Murdoch and others. I think that what he meant in the comment you quote in your letter is that Mr Murdoch would never be so crude as to say 'you do a, b and c and I will tell my papers to support you'. I have re-read that passage in my diary and it is worth also quoting the two sentences either side of it, in which Mr Keating said of Murdoch: 'He's a big bad bastard, and the only way you can deal with him is to make sure he thinks you can be a big bad bastard too. You can do deals with him, without ever saying a deal is done. But the only thing he cares about is his business and the only language he respects is strength'. I think that fuller context gives a rather different impression. I think he was saying that Murdoch has to fear that you would go after his business interests if you thought it was right to do so. I would also repeat the point I made above, that the speech itself challenged rather than pandered to their agenda. I recorded of that: 'I was a bit fearful of the potential political downside of appearing to ignore the Murdoch/right-wing agenda so I persuaded him [TB] to challenge that agenda harder.'

I have no recollection of the statement referred to in Andrew Neil's book. It does not sound like something Tony Blair would say. But I do think Mr Murdoch and other media owners may have been given a fairer wind than had they been in kill mode the

whole time. I would point out at this juncture that there was one major piece of Murdoch business that the government did stop, when he sought to take control of Manchester United, and was blocked from doing so. In addition, as Mr Murdoch has pointed out to the Inquiry, the role of OFCOM was not one he welcomed. I would add too that Mr Blair's basic desire was that there should be more media owners, but they - especially Europeans - should be encouraged into the marketplace to make it more varied, rather than existing owners forced to divest. His view of the media marketplace was that it was changing very quickly, and that it was important that the UK benefited from those changes as much as possible, and exploited its dominant position in the industry. He was not by instinct keen on looking at cross-media ownership if the result was likely to be titles closing. His hope was more that allowing foreign companies into the marketplace would shake things up, and bring in the influence of the more serious approach to print journalism of Continental Europe. This never really happened.

50. Mr Murdoch is without doubt the single most important newspaper figure in the UK landscape, his significance increased because of his TV interests, but that being said I do not recognise the relationship as defined by Lance Price. For the record, I should point out that Lance Price was not my deputy, as he has often been described. My deputy was a career civil servant. Lance was a special adviser who worked both in Downing Street and later at the Labour Party.

51. Mr Blair tended to meet Mr Murdoch when the latter was in Britain for board meetings. I don't know if Downing Street have a record of all meetings, but I would guess that most years they would have been in low single figures. They rarely spoke on the phone, though as has been reported Mr Murdoch did speak with the PM by phone in the days before the beginning of the Iraq war. I understand there were three

such calls around that time, out of a total of just six in a period from September 2002 to April 2005. Mr Murdoch has stated they were instigated by Mr Blair and with regard to some of them that may have been the case. But the only one of the three calls around the time of the start of the Iraq war that is mentioned in my diaries, for March 11 2003, would appear to have been at Mr Murdoch's instigation. My diary for the following day records Mr Blair's view that the call was 'odd, not very clever.' I think this was because at the time Mr Blair felt that Mr Murdoch was echoing the arguments being put by the Right in America, that 'the longer we waited, the harder it got,' and that in addition to restating that his papers would support us on the war, he was pressing on timings of any action that might be taken. I do not have any clear recollection of the call, or of Mr Blair's reaction to it, so am relying purely on my diaries. But I think this confirms the sense that such phone calls were very rare.

52. It is simply not the case to say no big decision was taken without Murdoch's reaction being taken into account. I could list dozens of policy decisions on which he would have had no advance knowledge, from Budgets to Queen's Speeches to peace processes to military action to White Papers, Green Papers and the whole panoply of government activity.
53. Mr Murdoch did tend to avoid the front door when he visited Number 10. So did other people. When I was continuing to advise the PM after 2003 I usually went in via the Cabinet Office or a side entrance to 12 Downing Street. There tends to be a media presence in Downing St most of the time, and if there is no particular need or desire to advertise a meeting, it makes sense to avoid the front door. Partly our thinking was that for the rest of the media Murdoch was uniquely neuralgic.
54. I think my reference to lobbying relates to the issue of whether the PM 'lobbied' Italian PM Romano Prodi on behalf of Mr Murdoch over a business interest. It was a

fairly big frenzy at the time and, because it coincided with a period when I was attracting a lot of media and political attention over other issues, (March/April 1998) a lot of the focus fell on my handling of it. The FT ran a story that the PM had ‘intervened’ with Mr Prodi on behalf of Mr Murdoch in relation to a proposed deal with Italian media magnate Silvio Berlusconi. We disputed the story on the grounds that Mr Prodi had actually initiated the phone call, which was about something completely unrelated, and on which the Italians had requested we did not brief. According to the lobby briefing note from this time, I was recorded as saying: ‘The conversation had covered a range of issues. It had been agreed that neither side would brief on it. This had been honoured. The FT should not use an anonymous Italian official to stand up a story that was wrong. Of course, if asked, we would always say that the PM spoke up for British firms. It would be a bit odd if, as the PM of Great Britain, he did not. This did not however stand up the story and talk of intervention presented in this way was simply wrong.’

55. The story ran for several days, and we did not move from that basic position. I do not recall what the issue was that Mr Prodi had discussed and which he had wished to remain private. Nor can I recall how the Murdoch issue resolved itself – from memory I think the Italians made clear he was wasting his time and he withdrew. I think what Mr Blair’s remarks as recorded in my diary refer to was his worry that the defence I had been using with the media – namely that it could hardly be described as intervention when it was Mr Prodi who initiated the call, which was about something else – did not negate the fact that they may have discussed Mr Murdoch’s attempts to get into the Italian market, something Mr Murdoch had told him about. I was less concerned because I felt my statement that ‘it would be odd’ if the British PM did not

stand up for British companies reflected that likelihood. Indeed, in the briefing of March 24 1998, journalists pointed out that my statement did not amount to a full denial, to which I responded that I was not adding to the statement.

**OTHER EDITORS/BROADCASTERS**

56. I do not have a record of which editors I saw when, unless I refer to them in my diaries, which do not record every meeting or conversation I had. There was a period when I saw Paul Dacre perhaps once or twice a year. But there came a point when the Mail effectively declared war on Mr Blair and all his works and we reached a judgement that any contact beyond the day to day with his reporters in briefings became largely pointless. I had regular contacts with the Mirror, mainly by phone calls with the editor, including during the period when the paper was very critical of our foreign policy. My contacts with the broadsheets tended to be at the level of political editor and chief commentators, and occasional calls with editors. I would say News International titles, the Mirror and the Guardian were the papers I spoke to most, but it would vary according to the news agenda. The individual journalists I spoke to most were probably the BBC and ITN political editors, particularly in our first term, because they liked on running stories to get the Number 10 view or analysis shortly before they went on air on the main bulletins at lunchtime, early evening and late evening.

**NUMBER 10 COMMUNICATIONS**

57. I have addressed this briefly above, and in greater detail in my first statement. Here I would add that my main objective on beginning my work in Number 10 was to make the government's communications fit for purpose in the media age. As I indicated

above, I sought and received the backing of Cabinet Secretary Sir Robin Butler in seeking to modernise government communication so that it became more co-ordinated, more strategic, less reactive and tactical. I continued the practice of my predecessor in briefing the press twice a day when Parliament was sitting, but over time I opened up these briefings. Putting them on the record was a major cultural change, both for government and for the media. I was the chief press secretary but I did not head the Government Information and Communication Service.

58. Many of the departmental heads of information left. Contrary to media reporting at the time, I was not responsible for this. I did not have the authority to move such people. But as personnel changes took place, I sought to strengthen co-ordination between departments. This was essential to good government and good communications. Recent handling by the current government – of the Budget, or the tanker drivers' dispute for example - have shown what can happen if such co-ordination fails.

**ORDER IN COUNCIL**

59. A good deal of nonsense has been said about this. It is not something that Tony Blair, Jonathan Powell or I asked for. I believe the idea came from civil servants in the Cabinet Office, presumably to give clarity to a situation in which Mr Powell as chief of staff and I as chief press secretary – though both special advisers - were clearly going to have civil servants working to us. I am not convinced it was of much significance, but perhaps the Senior Civil Service felt it might have been, had it not been there. But it was understood across the government that in relation to communications and strategy I had the authority of the PM when I spoke, and in practice it was never an issue and never a problem. I think I am right in saying that no

civil servant ever made a complaint about any instruction I or Jonathan Powell gave. Furthermore, I would add that my role as both government spokesman and political voice ensured that civil servants were never put under pressure to do anything that could be deemed party political. Civil servants working for me said that they found it useful to have such clarity, something they felt was lacking under some of my predecessors. They knew that they could point anything which they feared had party political connotations in my direction. I can also say that whereas all manner of people may have criticised me in print, they do not include the civil servants who worked directly for me. Finally on this, I think if you were to ask civil servants who worked to me, covered as I was by the Order In Council, whether there was anything they might do for me that they would not do subsequently for David Hill or Steve Hilton or Andy Coulson, who were not covered by the Order In Council, the answer would be No. Similarly, I do not believe David Cameron's chief of staff, Ed Llewellyn, is finding his abilities to do the job limited by the lack of an Order in Council that applied to Jonathan Powell. All the Order in Council really did was to give our political and media opponents an endlessly repeated token of supposed politicisation of the Civil Service. I say supposed, because it is my very strong view that there was no such politicisation. Sir Robin Butler has stated that the Order in Council was not needed, and a mistake.

60. The effectiveness or otherwise of special advisers will depend not just on their own abilities, but their closeness to the minister, and their abilities to work constructively with civil servants. In a small number of Departments, this did not go well, but in Number 10, I think the working relationships between special advisers and civil servants were very good. I would add that on any sensitive issues, then even special advisers as senior in the system as Jonathan Powell and I would not do anything

without general direction, and often specific checking, from our employer. Both internally and externally, any authority carried by a special adviser can only come from a minister or, in our case, the Prime Minister.

### **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS UNIT**

61. I was responsible for a number of hirings to the Number 10 team, and for the establishment of the Strategic Communications Unit, a new Research and Information Unit in Downing Street, and a government media monitoring service based in the Cabinet Office. It was remarkable that such functions were not clearly in existence beforehand, so that these tasks were carried out on an almost ad hoc, and chaotic, basis. Some of the SCU's initiatives, like the grid co-ordinating government activity, have continued largely unchanged under Gordon Brown and David Cameron. I had someone working to me fulltime on this part of our operation. He had contacts of similar level in every department. This would not have worked as well as it did had I been unable to instruct and hire, and to resolve disputes between departments without constant recourse to the PM and ministers who had bigger things to deal with.
62. You say that both Gordon Brown and David Cameron sought to distance themselves from aspects of our communications strategy that became associated with spin. It is certainly the case that in rhetorical terms, for perfectly obvious political reasons, they did. But in practice, having both briefed heavily that they would cut down on special advisers, both ended up going back on that when they realised how hard it can be to get effective co-ordination across government, and strong media relations, without them. Both also made great play of restoring the primacy of Parliament in being the place where policy was first announced. The build up to the recent Budget suggests

the current government has found that more difficult in practice than they expected to as well. By the time the Budget came, virtually every major announcement had effectively already been made.

**WHY SPIN BECAME SUCH AN ISSUE**

63. As I argue above, I am unpersuaded that the criticisms of spin, or its centrality to debate at the time, were justified. In part this arose because the media age was indeed becoming a reality, forcing governments and others to rethink what that meant in a world defined by the pace of change, where there was now no such thing as a deadline, but a voracious 24-7 interest in the actions of government. It arose too because our opponents failed to land many blows on the policy agenda, and the focus on spin acted as an easier substitute on which to attack. And it arose in part because at the time it suited the Opposition to persuade themselves they had been beaten by spin not leadership and policy. Part of their strategy was to portray Tony Blair as the frontman for a cynical media operation. It was a mistake, factually and strategically, and one of the reasons they failed to recover for so long. To return to the theme of Margaret Thatcher's media and political operations, when she had highly talented people like the Saatchis, and Tim Bell (also recipients of her use of the honours system for political ends) there were few complaints about spin. In the eyes of the Tory Party and their media supporters, the Conservatives were meant to be well-run, professional fighting machines. This was the natural order of things. When Labour responded with a similar determination to be professional in our communications, this became defined as spin.

64. I cannot emphasise enough that the overwhelming majority of my communications to media came from the briefings, every word of which were on the record. I uttered many hundreds of hours worth of words on behalf of the PM. I am very proud of the

accuracy of my briefings. I have accepted that to some extent we hung on to some of the techniques of opposition for the first phase of government (though on this one of the special advisers in the Treasury was the real problem) but in general we adapted fairly well. There were teething problems in some of the relationships between old and new but that is all they were. The objective of a more modern and efficient comms team was certainly met in Downing Street, and it played its part in many of the major issues of that time.

65. The PM's spokesman is expected to be as well briefed, twice a day, as the PM is at PMQs once a week. That is the mindset I certainly had in doing those briefings because I was conscious that I was speaking on his behalf. Anything and everything can be asked in briefings. There is a real desire to get news and to force the spokesman into saying things he shouldn't, or making mistakes. It is very hard to communicate to others, who have never experienced such a thing, what it is like when the media is in full on frenzy mode, a state it gets into fairly regularly. But I believe we took care to be truthful and accurate. What I also did was ensure that we were robust in our communications, that when newspapers and broadcasters got things wrong, we were entitled to say so.

66. **THE WORKING DAY**

My day usually began with a meeting with the PM. I would then chair a meeting at 8.30 of my team and representatives of key departments. This would review both the grid and a report of that morning's media. We would decide which issues I needed to be briefed on for the morning media briefing which took place at 11am in Downing Street. We would decide which departments needed to field ministers on the airwaves, which stories needed rebuttal, which issues required longer term planning. My team

would then co-ordinate materials and information I needed for the briefing, and a note would go round the system setting out what we had decided and what action was required. After the briefing my day would tend to follow the PM's. Then we would repeat the process, albeit without long meetings, for the 4pm briefing in the lobby room in Parliament. Then we would start to plan for the next day. In between times I would be working on speeches, reading policy papers, planning visits at home and abroad, and leading my team in dealing with whatever issues flared up day and night. I say all this not to complain about the workload, which was intense, but to say that outside of the briefings, I did not spend as much time as people might imagine dealing with journalists.

#### **WHETHER WE COULD HAVE DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY**

67. I have thought long and hard about whether we could have done things differently, and the extent to which we rather than the press were responsible for the breakdown in trust. I do believe the media and what it had become must take the lion's share of the blame. Indeed, the extent to which spin became an issue is itself a very good example of the extent to which the media are the spin doctors. The factors I outlined in my first statement combined to create a very different media environment. I worry that had we not been as robust as we were, we would have not as survived as long as we did. That being said, there were times when I perhaps lost my temper too readily, times when my contempt for some individual journalists and papers spilled over. At Tony Blair's suggestion, I once sought President Clinton's counsel about how to repair relations. He said 'go back to the media and say "I didn't lie, but maybe I missed something. I always strove to tell the truth but I've thought deeply about it all. I've got a job to do and so have you, and it's best if we can do it without regarding

each other as subhuman.” It was good advice, but that conversation took place not long before I left. I do think however that fair and reasonable journalists would support my view that we sought to be fair and reasonable with them, and most of the time succeeded. Indeed, whenever I came under the cosh amid whatever spin frenzy was being spun by parts of the media at the time, there were always some journalists willing to defend me. Also, when I left, a number of journalists were among those with whom I discussed my decision, as friends rather than enemies on different sides of the fence.

### **PHILLIS REVIEW**

68. I was a witness to the Phillis Review, but had left by the time it reported. I am therefore not well placed to assess its impact internally. I did believe that I had become such a symbol of the hostility between politics and media, and been the focus of so much of the coverage about spin, that my departure of itself might lead to an improvement of the terms of political debate. I think most of my successors would agree this was a misplaced optimism, and that media cynicism, both about Labour and more generally about politics and public life, now ran too deep. I believed then, and believe now, that only if the leading figures in the newspaper industry accept their role in the decline of press standards and the relentless negativisation of public debate, and show leadership towards a change of culture, will real change come. The basic analysis of the Phillis Review was broadly sound, but if government alone is deemed to be responsible for any changes made- for example in the changes in government communications systems that were recommended and largely followed - that alone will not be sufficient to improve the terms of debate. He rightly identified a three way

problem involving politics, media and public. All three have a role in making change for the better. Government alone, or regulation alone, will not do it.

### **REACTION TO HUTTON**

69. I left before the Hutton Report was published. However, the reaction to the Hutton Report, again as I said in my earlier statement, was indicative of the kind of media culture I have been talking about for several years. The Inquiry was without doubt the toughest period of my time in politics. It went in minute detail into the serious allegations made against us, both with regard to the WMD dossier presented to Parliament in September 2002, and the death of David Kelly. As evidence was taken, the media focused on those parts damaging to the government. As he put us through our paces, Lord Hutton was portrayed as a fearless seeker after truth. Once he established the truth - that the allegations were false - he became Lord Whitewash. Thousands of reports since, because he did not conclude what the media wanted him to, have sought to portray his judgement as flawed, and have sought to claim that because WMD were not found in Iraq, the BBC report was true. It was not. The truth is that just for once, a piece of media reporting was subject to the same intensity of scrutiny and examination as government words and actions are all the time, and the judge-led Inquiry found that it was the media, not the Government, that was found wanting. But because he did not conclude as the media had wished him to, his Inquiry was subject to a sustained rubbishing which continues almost ten years on. This is media acting as judge and jury, and because the judge did not say what they wanted, he was added to the list of people who must be defined negatively.
70. Contrary to media reporting, I did not resign because of the controversy. I had agreed a date for my departure with the PM shortly before the issue arose, and indeed I

stayed longer as a result of the dispute with the BBC. The PM replaced me with David Hill, who had been my recommendation. He, and the two civil servants who had been my deputies, were charged with seeking to lower the temperature between government and media, and did so successfully. They also sought to make the Number 10 briefings less newsworthy, again with success. One of the ridiculous things about my situation was that I was being reported from briefings as though I, rather than the PM, was the voice that mattered. That was one of the reasons I had pulled back from the day to day briefings in 2001 but the media continued to focus on me as much as they could.

I was not a witness to the Butler Report and I was not involved in any changes made in its wake.

### **SPECIFIC STORIES**

71. Re the specific stories mentioned in your letter - nobody with the PM's or my authority briefed the Sun on the election date in 2001. I would point out that they had previously run an 'exclusive' story with a different date, which turned out to be wrong.
72. On March 20 they led the paper with the headline 'MAY 3 ELECTION DAY: OFFICIAL.' The story said that Mr Blair would consult the Queen on April 2, Parliament would be dissolved on April 5, with a four-week campaign. These were stated as facts.
73. The story which accurately predicted the election date was published 11 days later, though the headline was ELECTION OFF. The sub-head was 'now it's June 7 as Blair puts country before party.' The intro was 'The election will NOT be held on May 3, it was revealed last night. Tony Blair has aborted the poll date and thrown the

full weight of the Prime Minister's office into the round-the-clock fight to save rural Britain.' At the time, with Foot and Mouth Disease rampant, there was a very live debate about the timing of the election. Many papers ran speculative stories. We did not encourage them.

74. Cherie Blair's pregnancy was known to a small number of people in Number 10.

When Mirror editor Piers Morgan called me to tell me he knew about it, I did not speak to anyone from the Sun. I did tell Mrs Blair that the Mirror knew. The Sun then heard the Mirror had a big story about her. Rebekah Wade called to ask what it was. Mrs Blair told her staff she did not want her pregnancy 'owned' by the Mirror, so she was happy for Rebekah Wade to be told. This was done without reference to me, though I was told after the event.

75. I don't know anything about the Barnardo's campaign.

### **THE MAIL**

76. You asked specifically about my attitude to the Mail. In Opposition, and in the early part of government, we sought to improve our relationship with the Mail. We offered articles and interviews, and sometimes would brief the Mail ahead of major speeches and events. I had lunch very occasionally with Paul Dacre. The PM would also see him from time to time. But there came a point when the paper switched from having any sense of balance about us whatsoever. This accelerated after the death of Sir David English who although one of Maggie's Knights had always wanted to give New Labour a hearing of sorts. It is said Mr Dacre turned against us because Cherie breastfed her son in front of him. I think this is something of a myth. I think the turning point was around the turn of the century. He told me in terms at one of our

lunches that the Opposition was useless, we were too powerful and it was going to be up to the press to be the Opposition. The fuel protest and the crisis caused by Foot and Mouth disease were examples of issues where this mindset dominated their coverage. But it infected virtually everything they said and did about the PM, his family, his friends and his team. This was a strategic decision which required a strategic response. It was ironic that we continued to be attacked by the left press for courting the Mail, years after either the PM or I had had any contact with Mr Dacre at all. I began to articulate thoughts publicly about the Mail and its role in this new culture of negativity. We published for a while a daily rebuttal of false stories, twisted facts and misrepresentation, which some days ran to several pages. We stopped this when the PM was lobbied by ministers closer to the Mail. Part of the argument I was having with the PM was that the British public needed to know the reality of the way parts of our media operated. The media were not going to tell them. So we should. He agreed only for the period of time we published Mailwatch.

77. From that turning point, it is very hard to find any story or article about Tony Blair, his family or his key people that was anything other than negative, a trend that continues albeit at a lower level today. The reason I picked out the Mail is that for all our complaints about some of the other papers, there was always the possibility of dialogue and they managed to maintain at least some semblance of optimism and objectivity every now and then. ENDS MAIN STATEMENT

**APPENDIX ... Extracts from Alastair Campbell's first submission for module 1, which may be relevant to module 3**

**A SUMMARY OF THE DEBIT SIDE**

78. So though I admire many journalists and much journalism, as the quote you refer to and other comments I have made over the years make obvious, I also believe that there are serious and endemic shortcomings in the culture, practices and ethics of the British media. I believe these have caused and continue to cause unfairness to many individuals and organisations affected, as well as often being against the public interest and damaging to important aspects of our public life. I believe that for too long these habits have been ignored or denied by the media themselves, and accepted with resignation and fatalism by the political classes as a whole.
79. Specifically, when I said that I believe the public would be shocked if they knew the truth about the way sections of the media operate, in addition to dubious practices like phone-hacking, and other specific activities on which I say more towards the end of this submission, I had in mind:
80. a. news values in which whether something is true counts for less than whether it makes a good story;
- b. a culture of negativity, in which the prominence and weight given to coverage is not proportionate to the significance or newsworthiness of the matter being reported, but whether it fits the agenda of the outlet, and particularly whether it is damaging to the target of the organisation;
- c. a lack of anything approaching the sort of transparency or accountability which

people would expect in any other organisations which played a sensitive and significant role in our national life;

d. a system of supposed regulation of the media which is ineffectual, dominated by the media themselves, and which allows inaccuracies, distortion, unfairness, invasion of privacy and dubious practices to continue with impunity;

e. a culture in which any attempt to check or question the role of the media is met with denunciations of the motives of those concerned, and instant claims that freedom of speech is under threat. This is a form of “media exceptionalism” which attempts to maintain the position that, unlike every other institution in public life, the media cannot be regulated, checked, held accountable or made transparent without a descent into totalitarianism.

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81. Editors are under enormous pressure. Journalists are under enormous pressure. In most of the newsrooms, there are fewer of them with more pages and online space to fill, and less time to do it. These are important factors, but they should not be excuses to let standards and ethics slip. Many of the worst examples of media ethics are not innocent mistakes made under pressure, but sustained and deliberate actions born of a change in culture.

82. Of course to some extent it has always been the case in journalism that the story is all that counts. But because the online revolution means there is no longer such a thing as a deadline, or a geographical boundary, speed is of the essence and in much of our media now, the race to get the story first takes precedence over taking time to get the story right.

83. In the days of competition on the news-stands papers held back the front page until as late as possible, including internally, because what mattered was the impact on the street. Now, even before the paper has been printed, front pages are being put online and sent to broadcasters in the hope that the impact can be more immediate. Then the story, if interesting enough, is taken up immediately by rivals keen to catch up. Again, this includes the broadcasters. It used to be the job of journalists working a night shift to wait for the other papers and check out any stories these rivals had. Today, there is no time to check. Debate on such stories is instant. It means journalists and broadcasters now routinely republish stories from elsewhere with no actual knowledge as to their veracity. The pressures are of course increased by the fact that members of the public are doing so in the same timeframe across the internet.

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84. it has meant that rather than journalism being about the pursuit of truth, much of it is the coverage of the process of getting to the truth, which often gets lost in that process. The old editorial rhythms that gave people time to think before they went on air, or committed to print, have gone. Discussions which used to be part of a backroom editorial process – have we checked this story out, who should we be speaking to, what are they likely to say, what are the implications if true? – are now a staple diet of broadcast news dialogue, live on air, in direct competition with newspapers, printed and online. ‘Not wrong for long’ is the amusing phoney slogan given to *Sky News*. There is a grain of truth within the joke.

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#### **THE FUSION OF NEWS AND COMMENT/INVENTION**

85. Alongside all this, news and comment have fused, which makes it harder and harder for the public to establish where fact ends and comment begins. This is particularly prevalent in those newspapers – now the majority - which have an agenda, political or otherwise, and who often make their impact by relentlessly pursuing their campaigns, using news as well as comment columns to paint a wholly one-sided picture of an issue or personality. Once again, this is not new, as anyone who worked for media moguls of the past will testify. But the acceleration of the trend has been clear, as newspapers have relied more on front page impact campaigns and manufactured news, less on hard news in the traditional sense. It means that as a matter of editorial policy, newspapers essentially refuse to set out two sides to a story. The *Sun* on Europe, or the trade unions, might be an example of this. The *Mail* on pretty much anything that does not coincide with the peculiar worldview of its editor. The *Express* on Europe. The *Star* on asylum seekers.
86. Tabloid newspapers in particular pride themselves on the robustness and aggression with which they pursue their campaigns. The question is whether they allow their zeal for the campaign to infect their commitment to accuracy, which is central to the code under which they are supposed to have been operating. The answer is that they do. Several of our national daily titles – *The Sun*, *The Express*, *The Star*, *The Mail*, *The Telegraph* in particular – are broadly anti-European. At various times, readers of these and other newspapers may have read that ‘Europe’ or ‘Brussels’ or ‘the EU superstate’ has banned, or is intending to ban, kilts, curries, mushy peas, paper rounds, Caerphilly cheese, charity shops, bulldogs, bent sausages and cucumbers, the British Army, lollipop ladies, British loaves, British made lavatories, the passport crest, lorry drivers who wear glasses, and many more. In addition, if the Eurosceptic

press is to be believed, Britain is going to be forced to unite as a single country with France, Church schools are being forced to hire atheist teachers, Scotch whisky is being classified as an inflammable liquid, British soldiers must take orders in French, the price of chips is being raised by Brussels, Europe is insisting on one size fits all condoms, new laws are being proposed on how to climb a ladder, it will be a criminal offence to criticise Europe, Number 10 must fly the European flag, and finally, Europe is brainwashing our children with pro-European propaganda! Of the UK press and the European institutions – I speak as something of a Eurosceptic by Blairite standards – it is clear who does more brainwashing. Some of the examples may appear trivial, comic even. But there is a serious point: that once some of our newspapers decide to campaign on a certain issue, they do so with scant regard for fact. These stories are written by reporters, rewritten by subs, and edited by editors who frankly must know them to be untrue. This goes beyond the fusion of news and comment, to the area of invention.

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87. Because of the pressures editors and senior executives apply, I believe the commitment to accuracy is no longer a cornerstone of much journalism. I recall once in the 80s writing a trailer of the Budget, speculating what might be in it. The editor asked me if I had seen the Budget. Of course not, I said. 'Then why are you writing this crap?' With so much space to fill, journalists have to speculate all the time. When working in Downing Street, I was always conscious of this before Cabinet reshuffles. Before one reshuffle, I recall ministers being reported on different occasions in different newspapers as being moved to nine different departments. In the end they didn't move at all. There is rarely if ever any comeback on the journalist who writes these stories. Indeed, I recall some saying the ministers had stayed in their old jobs 'as

expected'. It is my considered view that many of these stories were simply invented. Once one paper starts to speculate, others feel they have to follow suit. Ironically, given we have more media now, the herd tendency is even greater. Brave is the journalist who tells the editor, asking for a reshuffle story, or a line in advance of a major speech, that he doesn't have a clue what the Prime Minister is planning. Yet in advance of all the reshuffles I was involved in, that was almost certainly the case, so few were the people who knew what was planned. The stories get written. The stories are shown to be wrong by events. But by then the caravan has moved on, and nobody is held accountable for presenting fiction as hard news.

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88. In papers hostile to the government of the day, such as the *Mirror* today, or the *Mail* in most of Labour's time in power, on *The Sun* once it had shifted its political position before the last election, it is rare that any story is published which might reflect well on them. Or tactically, they may do the occasional one to pretend they are somehow balanced and objective. Papers with an editorial line for or against changing the voting system then slanted news coverage to suit the line. The recent debate on the Human Rights Act has been a good example of an issue where papers only report the stories that fit their editorial line. The *Sun* is currently engaged in a campaign to get the Prime Minister to sack Ken Clarke as Justice Secretary. Headlines, pictures, 'news' reports and editorials are all bent in that direction. I have no problem with newspapers running campaigns. They are a hugely important part of what a newspaper is. But they do have a responsibility to base them on facts, and there are almost as many invented stories about the impact of the HRA as there are about Europe.

**POLITICS AND THE MEDIA**

89. I know that your letter indicated I would be asked separately about politics and the media, but I would like to say something about this here, because I think it is central to the debate, as ultimately so much media coverage emerges from the political system, and because it is a failure of politics, as well as a failure of the media, that we are in the current situation. Politics has been more affected than most walks of life by the changes I set out above. When I made the statement you referred to about the modern media, I also noted that ‘if the public knew the truth about politicians, they would be pleasantly surprised’. I remain of that view, and apply it to all the main parties, including those whose politics, policies and values I disagree with. But politics and public life are now filtered through such a negative and cynical prism that it is very hard for any of them to maintain the understanding let alone the backing of the public they are seeking overwhelmingly to serve. Except in times of crisis and scandal, coverage of Parliament and parliamentary debate is now reduced to the occasional comedy sketch. What the politician says gets less coverage, in both print and on the broadcast media, than what the journalist says about it. Policy debates are reflected more via the personalities involved than on the issue under question.
90. This might be a useful place to set out some of the changes we introduced to make politics and media coverage of it more ‘on the record’ in an effort to make it more accessible to the public. When I was a political journalist the media were not even allowed to refer to the fact of Downing Street briefings. Journalists from the ‘lobby’ in Parliament would troop over to Downing Street, be briefed by the Prime Minister’s press secretary, and could report what he said, but only by referring to ‘sources.’ Journalists who quoted him directly risked expulsion and therefore the loss of an important source of information. It was an absurd position which eroded over time. I

put the briefings on the record so that anything I said could be directly attributed to the PM's official spokesman, and accounts of all briefings were put online. Tony Blair agreed to a monthly Prime Ministerial press conference and to becoming the first to appear before select committees in addition to PMQs, and to going out to do regular on the record meetings with the public, practices which have continued under Gordon Brown and David Cameron. But all of these attempts to put the debate on a more open and healthy footing tended to be dismissed as 'spin.'

91. I acknowledge that some in the media believe that we were a bunch of control freaks determined always to set the agenda on our terms. I have also acknowledged before that when we moved from Opposition to Government in 1997, we hung on to some of the media management techniques more suited to Opposition for too long, which gave the media the excuse they wanted to present all government communications – essential and legitimate – as more 'spin', and more 'control freakery'.
92. It is certainly the case that we felt we had to do a better job of setting the agenda than our predecessors of both Tory and Labour hue. Modern government is hard enough without being run ragged by the media, which is what happened to John Major, and to Labour leaders. Margaret Thatcher had much more press support, partly for political and ideological reasons, in that most owners and editors are right wing and genuinely supported her, but also because she operated what today would be seen as a corrupt system of patronage using the honours system to reward supportive owners and editors. She also, as set out in Harold Evans' new preface to his book, *Good Times, Bad Times*, turned a blind eye to the law to allow Rupert Murdoch to take a greater control over the media, which he used not just to his advantage, but to hers as well. She gave the media a sense of their own power, and many used it against her

successor, John Major. I was always determined to do what I could to avoid the same fate befalling Labour under Tony Blair. Though the press largely turned against him at various stages of his Premiership, and some continue to campaign relentlessly against him even now, we did have a fairly benign media environment for some years, and by the time they turned, most of the public knew him well enough to have a fairly settled view.

93. But though we did have a proactive strategy to minimise the potential negative impact of the press, our attempts to be more open were genuine if ultimately unsuccessful in terms of meeting the objectives we set for them. Freedom of Information is a good example. It was a real attempt to make government more open and accountable. I am not sure that has been the net effect, because the way many in the media use it – to pursue often trivial inquiries which take up huge amounts of civil service time and money - has made government employees, both ministers and officials, often less willing to commit to print thoughts and actions which probably they should. There has to be space within government for a process of debate and discussion, and it is arguable whether the extent to which FoI claims can disrupt that has been good for government. FoI will only work if there is a genuine commitment by both government and media to use it for the purpose it was intended – better to inform public debate. By some, that is indeed how it is used. But it is far from universal.

94. When your inquiry comes to investigate the relationship between politics and the media, I have little doubt some journalists will seek to claim that they had to become more negative and aggressive in response to our and in particular my changes in the approach to government communications. Even the reasonable ones like to say it is ‘six of one and half a dozen of the other.’ I reject their claims. We made changes to

adapt to the modern media age and to ensure we could communicate the reality of what we were doing to the public over time through the clouds of misrepresentation and trivialisation put up by the media. Communication is a necessary and legitimate function, indeed in my view a duty, of government in a democracy. The focus by the press on 'spin' was an attempt to deligitimise any communication about politics and government but their own, to make themselves the sole arbiters of what mattered, what was newsworthy and interesting or important, who was good, who was bad. I have argued before that both politics and media need to be more accepting of the role of the other. But I would defend the honesty and integrity of the bulk of politicians and those who work for them against the honesty and integrity of many owners and editors and those who work for them.

### **THE DECLINE OF GENUINE INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM**

95. At a journalism conference in Italy two years ago, I did an event with Carl Bernstein, one of the two 'Watergate' reporters. He said it was a great story, but a disaster for journalism; because ever since, as evinced by the number of '-gate' stories, journalists have assumed there must be a scandal lurking behind every public figure, and they can only really prove themselves if they bring down a top public figure. As Michael White of *The Guardian* said in the recent *In Defence of Politics* series on Radio 4, which I hope the panel finds time to hear, it is now not enough for the media to say public figures make mistakes. They must be venal and corrupt too. Most are neither.

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### **RELATIONS BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND OWNERS/EDITORS**

96. Politicians are often criticised for seeking to cultivate relationships with owners and editors. The reality is that most would probably wish they didn't have to. But in addition to the advantage of political support that can be generated by favourable media access and support, it is also an act of self-defence because of the political damage that can be done by the media in full cry. The same goes for high profile celebrities or businesses who have ever more sophisticated teams to try to deal with the media. Ed Miliband stood up for what he believed in the stance he took on phone-hacking, and he is right in saying political leaders of both main parties ignored wrongdoing in the media in the past, in part because they wished either to gain the support of newspapers, ensure the ability to get their point of view across to the public via their pages, or minimise the damage they could do. But in truth he is already paying a price in terms of the hostility of coverage, and the negative fusion of news and comment about his leadership. It is also possible to see within the government an attempt to ensure that though they have to make critical comments about the events which led to the inquiry, part of their calculation is about how they keep the media broadly onside as they approach the next election.

97. The modern media is so omnipresent, loud and aggressive that any politician or prominent public figure who does not to some extent court it, or at least find strategies for dealing with it, is likely to be damaged by it. In any event, the time and energy spent simply dealing with the volume of inquiries, and false stories which require rebuttal, make media management a necessary part of a public figure's operation. The internet has certainly opened the space, hopefully, for a more distant relationship between politics and media owners, but I would not bet on it.

**PAPERS AS POLITICAL PLAYERS/JOURNALISTS AS SPIN DOCTORS**

98. It is also the case that newspaper owners, editors and senior journalists have increasingly become political players as well as spectators, using newspapers either as instruments of unaccountable political power, or to promote their own commercial interests (as often happens in the Murdoch and Desmond papers' coverage of issues related to their broadcast interests for example), or to promote their own political agenda, not just in comment columns but across news pages too, which often continue to carry a veneer of objectivity, but whose substance is geared almost word by word to promoting the paper's line on an issue or an individual. It is this phenomenon that leads me to say the real spin doctors are the journalists, and politicians and their spokesmen spend inordinate time and energy trying to counter media propaganda with explanation of what they actually said and what they actually meant.

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**THE RELIANCE ON ANONYMOUS (AND OFTEN INVENTED) QUOTES**

99. In coverage of politics and many other areas, there has been a growing reliance on anonymous quotes, which on examining stories are often found to justify the screaming headline. We have no way of knowing how many of these quotes are real, and how many invented, but I am in no doubt whatever that many of them are invented. A rare example that proved this practise came recently when the *Mail Online* inadvertently published the wrong version of two stories prepared for the Amanda Knox appeal verdict. They mistakenly published the version prepared for her appeal being rejected, complete with reactions from her and her family, and quotes that 'justice has been done' by the prosecutor. This was spotted by Tabloid Watch.

100. <http://tabloid-watch.blogspot.com/2011/10/mailonline-makes-up-events-quotes-from.html>

101. The build up to Budgets was an area where the invention of stories via invented anonymous quotes was widespread. Now it is true that there has been a recent and unfortunate trend of advance briefing of Budget details. I can have no criticism of a journalist who, if briefed by senior people in the Treasury, reports that. But that does not negate the fact that so much pre-Budget coverage is invented. Of course it is also the case that sometimes the anonymous quotes were real and accurate, and that can be a legitimate form of journalism. But I strongly believe now that the invention of quotations by 'senior sources', 'insiders', 'senior ministers', 'close friends', etc is widespread. As Michael White has pointed out, quotes are never attributed to 'junior backbench MPs who don't see the Prime Minister very often.' It is also noticeable that most of the people quoted anonymously speak in the house-style of the medium in which they are quoted. Short sentences in the tabloids, longer in the broadsheets, pithy homilies on TV.

102. It is also my belief that most editors do not challenge their journalists, even when the story is proven to be wrong. There was a considerable furore recently when it was revealed that the *Independent* columnist Johann Hari took quotes from other people's books and interviews and made them part of his own. There was a similar furore over the broadcaster Alan Yentob pretending to have been in interviews which were actually done by a producer or researcher. Yet I am not aware of a single case where a story based on anonymous quotes has, on being shown to be wrong, led to a

reporter being disciplined or the paper acknowledging the possibility of invention. When the *Sunday Times* apologised to John Prescott last year over an anonymously based front page ‘story’, which turned out to be an invention, the paper, ludicrously, attributed their mistake to a ‘production error.’ This is in stark contrast to many of the broadsheets and magazines in the US say, where not only is there a system of ‘fact-checking’, but where a journalist whose anonymously based story turned out to be false would at least face the opprobrium of colleagues, and possibly disciplinary action. Though the online revolution is changing things there too, and standards are certainly lowering in some sections of the media, most American broadsheet journalists see themselves as professionals, with professional standards to uphold. I can recall one weekend being interrupted by persistent calls from reporters following up a story in the *Sunday Express* that I was leaving Downing Street to take up a position at Manchester United. This was based on so-called quotes from so-called friends and colleagues. I called the newspaper – which had not put the story to me in advance – to complain and to issue a strong denial. I said there was no truth in it whatsoever. ‘I know,’ came the response. ‘But it’s a good story.’ The PCC code on putting stories to the people concerned is broken routinely in this way. They knew the story was untrue, so did not put it to me because a denial would weaken it.

103. To sum up, in my experience of over a decade dealing with the political media, exaggeration, embellishment and pure invention are endemic, and are tolerated and indeed encouraged by some editors and senior executives.

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### **CULTURE OF NEGATIVITY**

104. I'm afraid I reached the conclusion that many journalists, including and indeed especially senior figures in the industry, did not wish to get the debate to a healthier place. It suited the culture of negativity being fostered to resist any such moves. It suited too the use of their papers as instruments of political power and influence without accountability.

105. That the Murdoch-Dacre-Desmond approach has created a culture of negativity is clear. Before his death, Robin Cook used to cite a report by an academic which suggested the positive to negative ratio in our papers had moved from 3-1 in 1974 to 1-18 in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even if that overstates possibly, it certainly reflects a trend. It reflects the widespread belief that negativity, hysteria, sensation and crisis are all that sell. In fact, I believe the press has made a collective and strategic error with this approach. In addition to technological change, the negativity is one of the factors that has turned the public away from the press as a prime source of news. They know in their own lives that life is not all bad, yet that is the prime message they get from large parts of the press. The public are smart enough to recognise overblown nonsense and hype, and the decline of newspapers has been hastened by people's weariness and frustration at the lack of any sense of proportion or balance in what the papers offer. So people are going elsewhere to find information they trust. The rise in social networks is in part based on the concept of 'friends' – we do not believe politicians as we used to; we do not believe the media; we do not believe business and other vested interests; we believe each other, friends and family, those we know.

106. Yet sometimes the scale of negativity can have a material impact upon the security, economic performance, health and well being of the country. To give an example: in a decade with Tony Blair, I think we had half a dozen genuine crises. We had hundreds described as such. Two of the genuine ones were the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001 and the fuel protest of 2000. In both of these, it became clear that much of the media saw its role not to report or to analyse, but to slant that reporting and analysis in a way designed to make the situation worse.

107. The fuel protest was one of those moments when the media genuinely and collectively lost the plot. Starved of a genuine opposition in Parliament, they saw in the rag-bag army outside refineries a way of curbing the Government's power. As I said in a speech on the issue a few years ago, they pretended a show of hands of a few farmers and truck drivers was somehow representative democracy or the stirrings of the same sort of political movement which brought down communism. They saw themselves as activists and agitators not journalists and commentators, not least when it came to their reporting of panic buying, which helped to create it, and were left feeling rather stupid when the public decided it had gone on long enough. It was an inevitable consequence of the media increasingly seeing their role as active participants in politics, seeking to mould and influence events, rather than to report them, and doing so without any accountability;

108. I think it was around then, as Tony Blair realised the media was doing everything it could to make the crises worse, rather than simply cover them, that he started to worry less about their opinions and more about their role in our society. His

analysis, set out in a speech he made shortly before leaving office, was that the changed media context meant that all that mattered was impact. “Of course the accuracy of a story counts, but it is second to impact,” he said. He went on, and I agree with this too, “It is this necessary devotion to impact that is unravelling standards, driving them down, making the diversity of the media not the strength it should be but an impulsion towards sensation above all else.”

109. I believe the speech, made shortly before he left office, and which failed to spark the debate he hoped it would, merits reading again in the light of all that has emerged since. At the time, ‘feral beasts’ took the headlines, he was accused of whining, and the caravan moved on.

110. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/6744581.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6744581.stm)

111. As I said to him at the time, I would rather he had named names and focused on those parts of the press – Murdoch and the *Mail* Group – which had been most influential in creating the trends he outlined. But even his reference to one paper he did single out – *The Independent* – was deliberately misinterpreted and dismissed as bitterness about their disagreeing with him over Iraq. In fact he was making the point that the paper had been founded as a reaction against the merging of news and opinion, but moved within 20 years to place itself explicitly at the forefront of "viewpapers", and so was something of a metaphor for the fusion of news and comment as the predominant theme in British newspapers.

112. Jeremy Paxman’s response, in the Mactaggart Lecture a few months later, was interesting.

113. “I thought the way we responded to Tony Blair’s speech was pretty pathetic,” he said. “On the central charges – that the media behave like a herd, have a trivial and collective judgement, and prefer sensation to understanding – he said “I’m sorry to say, but I think there’s something in all of these arguments.” But there was a collective refusal to engage on the substance. ... The media just “pressed the F12 key. Yah booh. You’re a politician. We’re media yahoos. Get over it.” He was a rare, almost lone voice to take the speech seriously, and analyse its contents rather than take the bits that fitted the pre-ordained pro-media agenda.

114. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1561287/In-full-Jeremy-Paxmans-MacTaggart-Lecture.html>

**LABOUR SHOULD HAVE ADDRESSED THE ISSUE WHEN IN POWER**

115. It is also the case that whilst from around 2000 onwards I argued government had a responsibility to be open with the public about his analysis of the press, and if necessary to make changes to the system of regulation and possibly ownership, the Prime Minister felt such a move at that time would not command public support, and it would simply appear like an already powerful government seeking to control the press. He also felt that with so many other major issues to deal with, this was not one to add to them. I do understand that. But equally I believe we could and should have done more to address the issue, whatever the political consequences may have been. He referred to my suggestions that the government confront this issue – possibly via a replacement of the PCC with a new body with the right to fine, and order placement of corrections and right of reply, alongside new cross media ownership laws – as my stuck record. At one point, he agreed to my office preparing and publishing a daily rebuttal of the many false stories in the *Daily Mail*, called Mailwatch. Some days this ran to several pages. But after some fairly intense lobbying from ministers who were

closer to the *Mail* than we were, he asked me to suspend it after several months. We singled out the *Mail* because, in particular after the death of David English, who had been something of a civilising force on Paul Dacre, it became by far the worst offender in terms of lies, misrepresentations and a distorted and distorting view of government and country alike. I wish we had kept up with Mailwatch, because at least we were able to show to others, day in and day out, the level of dishonesty and distortion that ran through the paper.

116. Tony Blair shared much of my analysis of what the press was becoming but felt a rational debate on it would be impossible because the media would control the terms of that debate. I felt the politicians could do so, but only if they chose to engage publicly in a debate about media standards. But the appetite for action, or even a review of standards, regulation and ownership, was not strong across government, and there were too many other competing priorities. However, I was in no doubt the extent to which the decline in standards, and the culture of negativity were impinging upon open democratic debate and good governance was a real problem. All too often, because of the sheer volume of events governments have to deal with, issues only get the attention and the chance to repair that they need when a crisis has been reached, or a set of circumstances has combined genuinely to shock and revolt public opinion. After years of build-up, and because of the scale of wrongdoing exposed in the press and the police, the full extent of the phone-hacking scandal did so, but it is important not to overlook the many changes in the years leading to that. Phone-hacking is the direct cause of this inquiry. But the broader trends and changes that have given us the media we have today are more significant even than the criminal activity already exposed.

**THE MEDIA CONTROLS THE TERMS OF DEBATE ABOUT THE MEDIA**

117. As to what Parliament or government can actually do about this culture of negativity – that is a very difficult question, because the media to a large extent controls the terms of debate about the media and will always be able to claim any political attempts at change are political attempts at control. I have said many times over recent years that media standards are unlikely to change for the better unless there is a proper debate within the media about the media. Even now, as I believe the contribution of most editors and senior journalists to your first seminar showed, they are approaching that debate in a largely self-serving way. Had it not been for the relentless pursuit of the phone-hacking scandal by *The Guardian*, the story would probably have died away, which is what most papers wanted because of the light it was likely to shed on the profession as a whole; it is what the police wanted because of their relationships with News International and other parts of the media; and it is what – once Andy Coulson was hired by David Cameron from the *News of the World* – the government wanted too.
118. Any attempt to challenge the status quo, whether in relation to regulation, ownership or any of the other major issues in the industry, is quickly condemned as an attack on the freedom of the press. Even now, despite all that has become known, that remains the prevalent attitude within the media about the media. Those who challenge from within, like John Lloyd or Roy Greenslade, are often seen as lone voices. Yet if you look at polling figures (YouGov 2009) which show 75% of the public saying that ‘newspapers frequently publish stories they know are inaccurate’, and only 7% saying they trust national newspapers to behave responsibly – a lower trust score even than banks at the height of the global financial crisis – and 60% calling for greater

government intervention to protect privacy, with 73% saying they would like the government to do more to correct inaccuracies in the media, surely they have a problem even they would wish to address.

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**PROPRIETORIAL INTERFERENCE, INCLUDING IN BREACH OF LEGAL UNDERTAKINGS**

119. I think I am right in saying that the ‘fit and proper person’ test has only been applied once, to David Sullivan, who like Richard Desmond made his money in the pornography industry, when he tried to buy the *Bristol Evening Post*.
120. We have to decide if we are serious about the need to end editorial interference by owners, and how that can be done. I hope the inquiry will look at the legal commitments on interference made by proprietors in the high profile takeovers of the last 30 years. That owners’ interference does not exist is a myth. Of course it always has. I worked on the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror* under Robert Maxwell who interfered regularly and persistently. Though often editors saw him off, often they did not. It is a nonsense, admitted to me by several editors at *The Sun*, to say that they rather than Rupert Murdoch decides which political parties the paper backs at elections. Likewise the stance on Europe in the *Sun* mentioned above is directly laid down from the top. As Harold Evans writes ‘In all Murdoch’s far-flung enterprises, the question is not whether this or that is a good idea, but “What will Rupert think?”’. He doesn’t have to give direct orders. His executives act like courtiers, working towards what they perceive to be his wishes or might be construed as his wishes.’
121. I remember a lunch at Wapping where I asked how it was that on an important and divisive subject like Europe, every single person in the room – senior executives, editors, commentators and political reporters – held the same avowedly anti-European

view. Harold Evans is worth reading also for his account of how Murdoch made promises to acquire papers, broke them when owning them, and politicians and editors alike in the main allowed him to. ‘Murdoch’s acquisition of Times Newspapers in 1981, and his ability to manipulate the newspapers after 1982, despite all the guarantees to the contrary to Parliament, were crucial elements in building his empire. ... A proprietor who had debauched the values of the tabloid press became the dominant figure in quality British journalism. ....If Prime Minister David Cameron wishes to demonstrate the sincerity of his new aversion to capitulating to News International he could take this opportunity to insist on enforcing the promises Murdoch made to Parliament in 1981.’

#### **THE HERD AND THE BULLYING CULTURE**

122. There is an element within this of a bullying culture, which states that anyone who stands up to prevailing media wisdom, or refuses to accept its ‘power’, has to be attacked and undermined. In July 2009, when *The Guardian* published a story indicating phone-hacking was even more widespread than had been thought, I did a number of TV interviews and articles saying this was a story that was not going away, that News International and the police had to grip it and come clean, that David Cameron should reconsider his appointment of Andy Coulson, and that what appeared to be emerging was evidence of systematic criminal activity on a near industrial basis at the *News of the World*. I received a series of what can only be termed mildly threatening text and phone messages from senior journalists and executives at News International. I know that Tom Watson, the MP who has pursued phone-hacking, was on the receiving end of a similar and more robust approach.
123. It is possible to see a similar if more muted approach in the coverage of this inquiry already, with the questioning of the judge and the panel, the beginnings of

what is likely to become a sustained campaign to undermine it unless it comes up with conclusions that the press themselves find palatable, particularly with regard to whatever systems of regulation and ownership are recommended. Mr Justice Eady gets a bad press because he has made rulings the press don't like. Mr Justice Nicol got a good press arising from the recent Rio Ferdinand case against the *Sunday Mirror* because he delivered a judgement the press liked, in that they felt it sanctions continued focus on the private lives of celebrities. This is the press as judge and jury, which is a role they would like to keep, and they would like to keep it free of the kind of regulatory oversight which every other major part of our national life has to bear. And of course even when the inquiry has reported, it will be for Parliament to implement any changes that require legislation, and once again most of the press will unite in targeting ministers and MPs minded to bring in a tougher system than the one that exists now.

**THE CHANCE FOR A FREE PRESS WORTH THE NAME**

124. Despite what the UK press has become, I believe in a free press as a cornerstone of a healthy, vibrant democracy. Newspapers must always poke around in the affairs of the rich and powerful. They help hold authority to account. They should always be difficult, challenging, suspicious of power. They must always take risks and push hard for the truth. They must be free to criticise, mock and expose. No matter how loudly I might complain about our press, I would rather have it warts and all than risk having the press of China, Russia, Iran or frankly, even parts of the media in France where the relationship between power and the press is far too cosy. But that does not negate my strongly held view that one of the reasons the health and vibrancy of our democracy has declined is because of the press we have. The freedoms have

been abused. It is sometimes said we get the politicians we deserve. As I have said, I think politicians are better than they are painted. But I do not believe Britain gets the media we deserve. The press, at a cultural level, has got itself into a position where it thinks only negativity sells, and where the ferocity of competition has led to a decline in standards. The combination has been corrosive. The principle of the freedom of the press is always worth fighting for. The quality of that freedom however is questionable when the quality of so much journalism is so low, and when so few people – just a handful of men until now seemingly unaccountable to anyone but themselves and to anything but their own commercial and political interests - have so much say over the tone and nature of public discourse, and so much responsibility for the decline in standards. It is also worth fighting therefore - politicians, journalists and public alike - to change the press we have.

125. The inquiry is perhaps a once in a generation opportunity to help the press regain standards of accuracy, fairness and decency, and a positive role in culture and society. The signs from the owners and editors so far have not been good. But there are many good journalists. They need to be empowered, so that the best of British journalism can drive out the worst.

126. Phone-hacking is the specific issue that had brought the general issue of the modern media to a head. But it is these broader issues of ethics, professional standards, fairness and accuracy, regulation and ownership which both media and Parliament have ignored for too long, with a bad impact upon our culture and therefore our country, and which I hope the next generation of politicians and journalists does a better job of addressing.

Statement of Truth

*I believe the facts stated in this statement are true.*

*Signed:*  .....

*Alastair Campbell*

*Dated: .....April 30 2012.....*