

**THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURES, PRACTICES
AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF EVGENY LEBEDEV

I, **EVGENY LEBEDEV** of 2 Derry Street, London, W8 5DP, WILL SAY;

I set out below the questions posed by the Leveson Inquiry and immediately underneath are my answers.

1. Leveson: Please provide an historical account of all of the commercial interests you have, have had, or have actively considered in the UK or any part of it. This should include (but is not limited to) Independent Print Limited and Evening Standard Limited. Please include a relevant chronology detailing the exploration, acquisition and development of these interests. The chronology should include, in particular, details of any part played in this historical account by government decision-making, whether in relation to the general regulatory environment or specific decisions.

EL: Before acquiring a controlling stake in the Evening Standard in 2009, I had commercial interests in a restaurant (Sake No Hana, now sold) and Dazed & Confused magazine, and was Chairman of the Raisa Gorbachev Foundation. I have subsequently become part owner of a public house, The Grapes, in east London. Government decision making and the regulatory environment had little to do with these acquisitions. I bought the Independent from Independent News & Media in March 2010.

2. Leveson: Please set out your aims, objectives, philosophy and practice in the way in which your business interests in the UK are acquired and run. You should in particular give a full explanation of the governance structures of your UK operations, including details of (financial, legal and other) risk management systems, and the powers and accountabilities within your senior staff structures, insofar as this has not already been submitted to the Inquiry by Independent Print Limited. The Inquiry is also interested in your personal approach to leadership; please explain how you communicate your personal vision, commercial and ethical expectations, employment practices and cultural values within your organisations.

EL: A detailed explanation of the governance structures have been provided to the Inquiry by my Editors, our Managing Director, and other executives. My aim is clear: to support and champion world-class journalism that is ethically sound, in the public interest, and an aid to Britain's democracy. The various papers have different philosophies and political leanings, but they are united in this sense: their focus is quality journalism that is accurate and fair, not muck-raking or sleaze.

I communicate my personal vision to the Editors directly, through regular conversations, Board meetings at which I make clear my expectations, and public pronouncements in speeches and articles.

3. Leveson: The Inquiry is particularly interested to understand your view of your responsibilities for the part your media interests can and should play as aspects of a free press within the UK democratic system. In what way do you consider your organisations to have responsibilities for, and to contribute to, the public interest in freedom of expression, and in promoting public political accountability in the UK? Please give examples. Are you aware of any possible tensions between your commercial interests and the public interest in this respect? If so, how are they resolved in your mind and managed in practice?

EL: I am not aware of any tension between my commercial interests and the support to freedom of expression in the public interest contributed by my papers. In view of the ambit and philosophy of my titles, this is most unlikely ever to arise.

If you think about what these newspapers do, I think it's really impressive. The Evening Standard brings top-quality reporting and analysis to a million and a half Londoners every day - for free. Very few capital cities have a newspaper that every commuter has placed in their hands every day at no charge. It provides a space where Londoners can talk to each other in real depth about the issues vital to the city. Look at the campaigns that exposed poverty and illiteracy in the heart of London, for example. Those were issues hardly anyone was talking about, but now agrees is crucial.

The Independent and its daily and Sunday sister titles provide world-class news analysis, and extremely well informed commentary. It has also has a very strong international appeal.

All the papers improve political accountability by taking a sceptical look at the political process, interviewing and reporting on leading figures in local and national government, and taking a strong position on the policies announced by various political parties.

4. Leveson: The Inquiry also wishes to understand specifically your approach to editorial governance in your various press interests. Please describe your relationship as proprietor to the processes of appointing and removing editorial staff, and the nature of your working relationship with your editors during the currency of their tenure. How often do you meet with or speak to your editorial staff, and for what purpose? How far do you indicate, and manage, the limits of editorial self determination? Your answer should cover both the general approach, cultural expectations, brand definition, and specifics of editorial content. It should in particular address the issue of the allegiance of your titles to the prospects or policies of specific political parties – including but not limited to the part played by editorial stance during and in the run-up to democratic elections within the UK, and the expression of opinion by your titles about the appointment and performance of individual government ministers.

EL: The editors of my newspapers are independent. As they have already testified to this Inquiry, I have no day-to-day involvement in the running of the papers; nor do I get involved in the selection or slant of particular stories. I believe this is very important if the papers are to retain their integrity and reputation.

How much I speak to editorial staff varies in accordance with what is going on at the time. On average, I speak to the editors once a week; sometimes, it rises much higher, and at other times I will go a fortnight without speaking to them. My purpose is to find out what is happening at the papers, how best I can continue to support them, and whether or not major changes need to be made. I am not involved in making or breaking appointments.

Naturally I do tell editors what the commercial constraints on them are, at a difficult time for all newspapers. I also do insist on maintaining the highest standards, because I don't want our brands besmirched in any way. My editors are free to support the political parties they choose to, but if they ask my opinion on a particular policy I have no qualms about giving it. I have absolutely no involvement in the endorsements or analysis given by columnists at the titles.

5. Leveson: The Inquiry would like to gain an understanding of your personal involvement with politicians over the period during which you have had commercial media interests in the UK. How do you allocate your own personal time in this regard? To this end:

a. Please describe the general nature of your personal relationship with successive UK Prime Ministers. How would you describe the similarities and differences in these relationships? What is the value of these relationships to you, and what is your understanding of the value of the relationship with you to them? To what extent is political support for any individual, party or policy discussed in such interactions? Please provide a complete list of all meetings, formal or informal, you have had with a British Prime Minister, indicating at whose initiative they were called and describing, by way of as specific a summary as possible, the content of these discussions.

b. To what extent do you meet other senior politicians, including opposition leaders? How often do you meet them, and to what purpose? Please provide a complete list of all meetings, formal or informal, you have had with a British leader of the opposition, indicating at whose initiative they were called and describing, by way of as specific a summary as possible, the content of these discussions.

c. If the issue of the support of any of your titles for a political party in the run up to general election has arisen in the in the course of such discussions, to what extent has such support been – expressly or impliedly – conditional, and on what sort of decisions or contingencies?

EL: a. I met Gordon Brown when he was Prime Minister and have stayed in touch with him since. I have met David Cameron four times, once since he became Prime Minister. My relationship with both is similar: civil and courteous. The relationship is valuable to me because it is interesting to hear the thinking at the top of government. Regardless of their political persuasion, I have respect for Prime Ministers who work

hard to serve the country. The value to them in these meetings is to find out what is being thought in a leading newspaper group, to ascertain the level of editorial support the government might receive from various newspapers, and to chat. The initiative varies; sometimes I request a meeting; at other times, the Prime Minister asks to see me.

b. I regularly have meetings with senior politicians from all parties. I enjoy finding out what is happening in each different party, discovering new political talent, and discussing the latest developments in Westminster and beyond. I met David Cameron twice when he was Leader of the Opposition and have met Ed Miliband twice since he became Labour leader.

c. The support of particular titles for different parties has been discussed in these meetings, but it has never been conditional on any specific condition. I know the Editors of the titles have submitted evidence to the Inquiry on this matter.

6. Leveson: What are your views and expectations about the engagement of editors and senior staff at your titles with politicians and with issues of public policy? Your answer should address matters such as social relationships, hospitality, consultative roles, involvement in the development or delivery of media or other public policy, lobbying, and the expression of support, whether personally or editorially, for any political party, policy or individual. How far, in your view, would it be appropriate and in the public interest for contacts between politicians and leading figures in the media – proprietors, senior executives and senior editorial staff – to be more transparent to the public in future? How, if at all, would greater transparency impact on your own conduct and the conduct of your business interests?

EL: Naturally I have made it clear to my Editors that they must ensure their journalists can never be ‘bought’ – at any price, or with any gift. I understand that journalists are often required to have strong relationships with those on whom they report, but a healthy degree of scepticism, and insistence on never collaborating in any way, must remain in place. I have reinforced these points to my Editors at Board meetings.

Of course I support greater transparency. It would be impractical for all meetings between journalists and politicians to be recorded, but I am happy for all meetings between proprietors and politicians, and Editors and politicians, to be publicly declared. How “senior staff” is defined will dictate my views on that matter.

None of this would greatly affect my own conduct. I am confident and secure enough in my reasons for meeting politicians to carry on the way I have been for some time.

7. Leveson: The Inquiry would be interested to have your perspective on the concerns which have been expressed recently, both in evidence to the Inquiry and more generally, that the culture, practices and ethics of the press are or have been conducive to outcomes which are not in the public interest. Your answer should, in particular, describe your views about the following:

a. the evidence uncovered by Operation Motorman in and set out in the Information Commissioner's 2006 reports What Price Privacy and What Price Privacy Now – what (when later you became the owner the Evening Standard) was your reaction to the reference to the Evening Standard in that material, and what steps did you take in response? Have you taken any steps or discussed the matter with staff at the titles? Please explain your approach in full.

b. Phone hacking – please describe how and when you first became aware of the convictions of Glenn Mulcaire and Clive Goodman. What was your reaction to these convictions and what steps, if any, did you take in relation to your own titles (once you had acquired them)? Did you reflect further, or take any further steps, as a result of the Guardian's report in 2009 that the extent of phone hacking at the News of the World was more extensive than had been admitted? Or when the phone hacking scandal re-emerged into the public spotlight in the summer of 2011?

EL: I have enclosed the text of a speech I gave on July 5th last year at an Independent Voices event, in which I made clear my concerns for the future of journalism in Britain. I also enclose an article for The Guardian newspaper, printed on the same day, in which I cover the same area. My views have not changed, so I would invite the Inquiry to review those contributions to the public debate.

a. The practices at the Evening Standard uncovered by Operation Motorman took place several years before I became involved in the paper. I have sought, and received, assurances from both the Editors and senior management that any such practices are discontinued. These have been discussed at Board level. Crucially, the company has at my instigation introduced a new Code of Conduct, which applies to all staff. This is rigorous and binding.

b. I first became aware of the convictions of Glenn Mulcaire and Clive Goodman when they were reported in the national media. My reaction and dismay are recorded in the enclosed article and speech. As with Operation Motorman, I took immediate steps to ensure that we as a company did not behave in a similar fashion. Again, I have sought, and received, assurances on this matter, they have been discussed at Board level, and the new Code of Conduct is designed to accommodate my strong feelings on the matter and we have implemented a completely different culture.

8. Leveson: What are your views on any changes which could be made to the system of press regulation in the UK to balance more effectively the public interest in a free press and freedom of expression, with other aspects of the public interest including respect for private rights and the rule of law? Your answer should in particular cover the financing and independence of future press regulation, and measures to guarantee public confidence.

I believe that, in a strong democracy, self-regulation of the press is preferable to statutory regulation. It follows that we need to make self-regulation work as effectively as possible. I have two main criteria for self-regulation, and recognise two major areas of difficulty, on which I do not have the answers.

My two criteria are that self-regulation should be transparent and understandable to

the public. By transparent, I mean that all of the workings of any regulatory body should be open and known across the industry. There cannot be any lingering sense of an old boys club, or appointments being made in an inexplicable manner.

By understandable to the public, I mean that self-regulation should not be shrouded in impenetrable jargon, and that punishments for breaches of a Code of Conduct should be clearly visible to consumers of the press. Greater prominence for corrections (whether on Page 2, or on the same page as the initial error), and heavy, better publicised fines for offenders are both worthy options.

The two major problems are: first, how to ensure that every media group participates in self-regulation; and second, how to regulate the internet, which by its nature is more transient than printed news, and operates internationally.

On both these issues I know that interesting discussions are already underway across the industry, and I am intent on discussing the whole area of self-regulation with other proprietors before making any recommendations.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed
Evgeny Lebedev

Dated