

Why we don't want a press statute

by Francis Bennion

When in a *Times* letter (5 December 2012) I originally suggested a Royal Charter as the answer to Leveson, I did not envisage one such as is provided by the 'third option' that Nick Clegg (16 March) supports. This would impose an outside regulator created by statute on our supposedly free press, which would not then be free at all.

Because the Leveson report itself envisaged statutory interference, I said in my letter that it was a failure. There are two types of Royal Charter. One is like the charter governing the BBC, where the government actively participates in periodic renewal of the charter. The other is the type I envisaged for the press, where the charter is permanent and the government does not interfere in its day to day operation.

Mr Clegg says that his chosen method would contain 'an explicit safeguard against future governments playing around with the Royal Charter'. Evidently he has not learnt from his brief time in Parliament that our constitution does not permit any government to bind its successors.

By their criminal phone-hacking activities some sections of the press have disgracefully abused their freedom. Protection of the public from any further such abuses should be provided by a strengthened criminal law. It does not belong in the sphere of the proposed Royal Charter.¹

Francis Bennion, retired Parliamentary Counsel.

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Website: www.francisbennion.com

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References:

None

¹ Published in *The Times* on 18 March 2013.