

The following appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on 25 April 2013:

Self-regulation that is tough but independent

Our draft Royal Charter provides the press safeguards that Parliament seeks, without involving politicians

by Telegraph View

When the veteran jurist Francis Bennion proposed last December that independent press regulation could be enshrined by way of a Royal Charter, the idea was seized upon by the Government. It had been anxious to find a means to implement the recommendations of the Leveson Report for a new regulatory structure without, as David Cameron put it, “crossing the Rubicon” of statutory imposition. The newspaper industry also found this suggestion attractive and began devising a replacement for the discredited Press Complaints Commission that would meet Lord Justice Leveson’s central aim – voluntary and independent self-regulation.

Mr Bennion’s intention was that newspapers should themselves put together the substance of the Royal Charter, as other chartered organisations have done down the years. However, our politicians – egged on by the pressure group Hacked Off – were not prepared to wait while this exercise took place. Some took to hijacking government Bills in an effort to bring newspapers to heel. Partly to save his legislative programme, Mr David Cameron caved in to demands to bring forward what Nick Clegg conceded was a mixture of Royal Charter and statute. A cross-party deal was struck at a late-night meeting to which no newspapers were invited but members of Hacked Off – a murky organisation that declines to say who funds it – were.

This newspaper, in common with most other national and regional publications, was unwilling to accept that more than 300 years of press freedom should be jettisoned in such a cavalier and huffer-mugger fashion. Yet we also recognised that public trust in the industry had been seriously damaged by the phone hacking scandal and the evidence heard by Lord Justice Leveson. We have sought, therefore, with others in the industry, to devise a system that essentially replicates the robust and independent structure sought by Parliament.

The draft Royal Charter published yesterday by Telegraph Media Group and other organisations will be the toughest form of self-regulation in the West. The new regulatory body can be established quickly, has the backing of most newspapers and will be paid for by the industry. For members of the public, it will provide the same safeguards and opportunities for redress that Parliament seeks, but without involving politicians in its creation. This newspaper has long acknowledged that an effective regulator is needed if public confidence in the press is to be restored. We believe that the proposals we have put forward will bring this about; and it is not in our interests, or those of our rivals, that it should fail.’

Geoff - Please put all the above (including my introductory words) on the website with a linking SHOUT on the Home page. The above should be placed at the end of the item headed FB’s Daily Telegraph article on Leveson Report.

Website: www.francisbennion.com

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For full version of abbreviations click ‘Abbreviations’ on FB’s website.