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## [How chilling is Leveson for Press Freedom?](#)

**April 2012**

[Patrick Hayes](#) and [Helen Nugent](#) introduced a discussion on what impact the Leveson inquiry is having on Press Freedom



Established following the News of the World hacking scandal, the Leveson Inquiry has seen a flood of celebrities expressing their disdain for the way the media has operated, alongside a wide range of others, from scientists, to feminists, broadsheet journalists and pro-drug campaigners.



While Lord Justice Leveson himself has said he'd be 'surprised if government regulation ever entered [his] mind', some form of new regulatory body – even just in the form of a revamped Press Complaints Commission 'with teeth' looks almost certain. Would such a body be effective in ensuring that another Hackgate arises again? And, if so, could there be unintended side effects? What could be the implications for investigative journalism – and, more broadly, for press freedom?

As Hugh Grant argued as a witness at the Leveson Inquiry, 'no one's taken a privacy case against the Guardian'. Many argue that restrictions on the press are necessary to tame the feral tabloids and more erudite discussions would be unaffected by a new body. And it's clear from witnesses at the Leveson Inquiry that from Page 3 girls, to unsavoury sleb photos and lewd speculation into people's private lives, hatred of the tabloids goes far deeper than simply phone hacking.

'Tabloid culture' has been accused of everything from generating a dumbed down climate of ignorance, to the dangerous objectification of women and warping the aspirations of celebrity-obsessed youth. Some called for a boycott of the Sun on Sunday to protest against this. But is it as bad as some make out? Indeed is indulging in gossip and gawping at celebrities really such a vice, or harmless fun? Are critics calling for the tabloids to be tamed really talking about the papers, or the public who choose to buy them in their millions?

Karl Marx once argued that 'you cannot enjoy the advantages of a free press without putting up with its inconveniences. You cannot pluck the rose without its thorns!' In trying to further regulate the press, to pluck the rose without the thorns (in this case the tabloids), what are the advantages of a free press that could be lost as a result? Indeed, do we currently have enough of a free enough press as it stands? Should it not be the public who's best placed to decide what's in the 'public interest'?

## Some background readings

[Alan Rusbridger delivers the 2011 Orwell lecture – video](#) , by Alan Rusbridger, Guardian 11 November 2011

[The truth about anti-tabloid hysteria](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, spiked 13 December 2011

['This is becoming an anti-tabloid witch-hunt'](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, spiked 24 January 2012

[The Leveson Inquiry is the enemy of a free press](#) , by Mick Hume, spiked 25 January 2012

[Hugh Grant's testimony](#) at the Leveson Inquiry, 6 February 2012

[The Sun, the baby and the bathwater](#) , by Brian Cathcart, Hacked Off 12 February 2012

[Who's afraid of the Sun rising on a Sunday?](#) , by Mick Hume, spiked 21 February 2012

[Leveson Inquiry has created 'chilling atmosphere that threatens free speech in Britain'](#) , by Jason Groves, MailOnline 22 February 2012

[Leveson inquiry: the anti-tabloid campaign](#) , by Brendan O'Neill, The Drum Opinion (ABC.net.au) 29 February 2012

[Why we're launching the Counter-Leveson Inquiry](#) , by spiked editor Brendan O'Neill, 29 February 2012

[Anya17 - Clarification](#) , by Danielle Middleton, Denis Joe, Simon Belt and others, Mancunion 21 March 2012 onward

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