

News Media

Headline positions: those taking a stand on press regulation

DAILY MAIL

The newspaper has published editorials raging against state regulation and devoted 12 pages to an investigation into Sir David Bell, an adviser to the Leveson inquiry, alleging an "incestuous network of political, business, and financial links".

ANTI

Daily Mail

THE PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION AND THE PRESS STANDARDS BOARD OF FINANCE

The PCC chairman, Lord Hunt, below, and Lord Black, who chairs its funding body, propose replacing the PCC with a body that could fine papers up to £1 million.



FREE SPEECH NETWORK

Members include Newspaper Society and Society of Editors. Supports Lord Black plan for a beefed-up regulator. It took out adverts suggesting that scoops would not have taken place under statutory legislation.



NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

The Guardian said statutory regulation risked returning to "something which was abolished in the 17th century". The Telegraph claimed that "there will be a constant danger of restrictions imposed by politicians to protect politicians".

BORIS JOHNSON
MAYOR OF LONDON

Warned MPs not to think "for one moment... about regulating a press that has been free in this city for more than 300 years".

MICHAEL GOVE
EDUCATION SECRETARY

A former Times journalist, the Education Secretary is a key opponent of statutory regulation. He mocked Lord Justice Leveson at an awards lunch this month.

GEORGE OSBORNE,
WILLIAM HAGUE
AND ERIC PICKLES

Other government ministers who have spoken of misgivings in terms of legislating on press freedom.

PROFESSOR TIM
LUCKHURST

PROFESSOR OF JOURNALISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT. Advocates a new self-regulatory system with the power to summon journalists to give evidence and issue fines for unethical conduct.



THE PRIME MINISTER

David Cameron has said that he intends to implement Leveson's proposals unless they are "too heavy-handed" or "bonkers". The Prime Minister will see the report on Wednesday and Downing Street insists that he remains "open minded".



PM may give press one last chance but keep regulation Bill in reserve

Statutory regime could be rushed in if tougher self-policing fails, Roland Watson and Jill Sherman write

A draft Bill could be used by David Cameron to threaten the freedom of the press if editors fail to comply with one last chance at independent regulation.

The Bill would be hurried on to the statute book if newspapers did not adhere to tougher standards of self-policing. The option is being actively discussed in Downing Street as a "third way" between accepting and rejecting the recommendations of Lord Justice Leveson, which are due to be published on Thursday.

It coincides with a decision yesterday by 40 Tory MPs, including four former Cabinet ministers, to sign a letter calling for the press to be allowed another shot at self-regulation. The letter, jointly organised by Conor Burns, a Tory backbencher, and David Blunkett, a former Labour Home Secretary, will be circulated in the Commons and the Lords today and published tomorrow.

"The party is actually a little bit divided on this," Mr Burns said on BBC Radio 4's *The World This Weekend*. "There is a letter coming this week in which more than 42 colleagues are saying we should try and do this on the basis of a common agreement and self-regulation — but on a much more robust footing — without taking away the prospect of statutory, the threat of statutory regulation if it doesn't work."

Two weeks ago more than 40 MPs signed an alternative letter supporting statutory press regulation, with more signalling their backing in the past few days. But yesterday William Hague also added his weight to those supporting the independence of the press. The Foreign Secretary said he was a "big supporter of press freedom" but added that he wanted to read the Leveson report before giving a verdict. He warned Lord Justice Leveson that future regulation of the press should "err on the side of freedom".

No 10 insisted that Mr Cameron would not pre-judge the findings of the Leveson inquiry, which he will receive at 1.30pm on Wednesday. But he would



The actress Sienna Miller was among witnesses who gave evidence of suffering press intrusion to the Leveson Inquiry

find it easier to come out on the side of press freedom if he had the backing of a substantial number of backbenchers and some Cabinet ministers in advance. Michael Gove, Grant Shapps, Eric Pickles and George Osborne have all indicated that they would find it

hard to support statutory regulation. Mr Cameron will read the report overnight and a team of senior civil servants and aides will help him to draft a response, to be delivered to the Commons on Thursday lunchtime.

"He is not going to close his mind

before he reads it," said one senior figure at No 10. Only a small number of ministers — Nick Clegg, Maria Miller, the Culture Secretary, and Theresa May, the Home Secretary — are expected to see a copy on Wednesday.

MPs will discuss the report the

following Monday, although there is currently no Commons vote scheduled.

The Prime Minister is unlikely either to accept or reject the Leveson proposals this week. He is keen to set out his early thinking on Thursday, although it is likely to be several weeks, or possibly into the new year, before he makes up his mind. Much depends on what Lord Justice Leveson recom-

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mends, said aides, and how the press responds.

A Downing Street insider said that Lord Justice Leveson had spent a lot more time thinking about the issue, adding: "It's possible he can come up with a workable solution." Equally, Mr Cameron is anxious to see what kind of new independent regulatory body the press is proposing as an alternative to the system underpinned by statute that Lord Justice Leveson is expected to propose. "A lot depends on what the press have come up with," said one senior figure.

A likely outcome would be for Mr Cameron to give a much tougher independent regime a chance to work, but to have a draft Bill ready, perhaps based on Lord Justice Leveson's recommendations, to pass into law if self-regulation flounders.

Contempt law change is urged to thwart bloggers

Behind the story
Frances Gibb, Legal Editor

The media is facing an overhaul of the contempt laws prompted by the rise of Twitter and bloggers. Current laws should be condemned as out of date so that "citizen bloggers" and others who publish information about criminal trials can be punished, law reformers are to recommend.

The Law Commission, the Government's law reform watchdog, says there is concern that laws have failed to keep pace with technological advances which enable information

about trials to be published on the internet. The growth of blogs and social networking sites means that members of the public can publish opinions and information about criminal proceedings and "reach a very wide audience", it says.

A consultation paper to be published tomorrow will outline proposals to reform the common-law offence of contempt and the Contempt of Court Act 1981. It will propose rationalising courts' powers to tackle contempt so that they are consistent across magistrates' courts, Crown Courts and Courts of

Appeal. This could mean higher fines that include the cost of retrials where comment has caused a trial to collapse or be aborted, and powers to detain or bail a person while the court determines an allegation.

Stevie Loughrey, a media lawyer with Carter-Ruck solicitors, said: "The rationale of the 1981 Act is commendable — jurors' minds should be free from the polluting effects of prejudicial information." However, the march of unfettered "new media" into the daily lives of an ever increasing proportion of the

population had conspired, on occasion, to make [the Act] look like a "quaint anachronism", he said.

There were "endless forums, chat rooms, blogs and social networking sites containing reams of material", he said. And such "citizen journalism" was increasingly pervasive.

Journalists receive extensive training on media law, but bloggers often have no knowledge of the legal implications of what they publish. Lord McAlpine is now suing "a very long list" of Twitter users who posted false information about him.