

## [Rupert's real threat](#) [1]

Written by [Jan Boucek](#) [2] | Monday 18 July 2011



True liberals and government minimalists must now battle those clamouring for more regulation of the UK's press. Rupert Murdoch's woes have unleashed a frenzy of schadenfreude amidst suddenly emboldened politicians and the broader Westminster chattering classes, all demanding stronger oversight of the news business.

As with so many other incidents of lawbreaking, the cry goes out for yet more laws, even as those already in place had failed to eradicate evil. Just consider how already illegal acts like murder by terrorists spawned yet more laws that infringe on the innocents' rights ? like harassment of tourists taking photos of public buildings or artists setting up easels to paint street life.

As with any industry, tighter regulation would suit all participants. Politicians would be spared the inconvenience from those not playing by some unwritten rules. News organisations would see higher barriers to entry by competitors. Formal licensing of journalists would secure the jobs of incumbents.

Most importantly, though, tighter regulation would stifle the creativity and enthusiastic irreverence of the press. The price of this freedom will be occasional steps beyond the justifiable but still a price worth paying. After all, it was the press that exposed the MP's expenses scandal and the News International shenanigans. It wasn't the politicians, the regulators or the police.

The Murdoch frenzy has an increasing air of unreality about it. Cries that something must be done about the 'press' and the 'red tops' in particular sound so yesterday. There's the misguided assumption that they are somehow powerful and must be either courted or controlled even as they're slowly fading into history.

The real creativity and imagination in news gathering and distribution is rapidly shifting to the likes of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WikiLeaks and a seemingly endless stream of competitors and innovators. It wasn't more regulation that spawned these, just the opposite. In responding to the News International incidents, the Westminster clique is like the generals preparing to fight the last war.

In that sense, the only difference that greater regulation of the 'press' might make is to hasten their extinction. If pre-occupation with yesterday's industry keeps the politicians from meddling in tomorrow's, that's a good thing. However, it would also whet their appetite and set the precedent for regulating the news business of the future. Libertarians, on guard!

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