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Press Complaints Commission

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From the Acting Chairman

Ian Reeves, Esq.,
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14th March 2003

Dear Sir,

Your excellent reports on the progress of the Select Committee inquiry are faultless – with the one exception that they perpetuate the myth that the industry is riven by a “rift” over self regulation. Let me make three observations.

1. There has always been – and always will be – a variety of views among editors about the way the PCC should operate. As well as being inevitable, it is quite right that such diversity exists. It is in many ways one of the strengths of the system because it means we are constantly looking at ways to improve our service to ordinary members of the public, and to raise standards of reporting. It is nothing new – and it is not a “rift.”
2. While a number of broadsheet editors have been critical of aspects of self-regulation, it is quite wrong to portray this as a divide between tabloids and broadsheets. Other broadsheet editors – including those who have served on the Commission – take a different view. Even those who are critical of the system as presently structured are, as I see it, supportive of the broad principles of self-regulation. Alan Rusbridger in particular made important and constructive proposals to the Select Committee which need careful and thoughtful consideration – but they were based on the premise that self-regulation must be preferable to legal controls.
3. It is crucial to remember – even though it is something the Select Committee appears to have forgotten – that self-regulation is not just about the national press. There are 1,300 regional and local newspaper editors who deserve, and are entitled, to their say as well. From them there has always been strong support for our work as indeed there has from magazine editors and the overwhelming majority of national editors.

In short this is a frank exchange of views among people who agree on fundamentals but disagree on some practicalities. It is a debate which I welcome, but it is not a “rift” – and a good thing too. The industry should be united at this time, as its freedoms are under greater threat than ever.

Mr Justice
[Signature]

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(Dictated by Professor Pinker and signed in his absence)

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