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DWM/RB

22 November 2005

Tim Toulmin  
Director  
Press Complaints Commission  
1 Salisbury Square  
London  
EC4Y 8JB

Dear *Tim,*

I thought you may be interested in reading the enclosed letter from Rotherham MP and former Minister for Europe, Denis MacShane, and my reply to his call to initiate an inquiry into Sir Christopher Meyer's continued chairmanship of the Press Complaints Commission, especially as Dr MacShane is discussing the issue with fellow MPs and wishes to circulate my reply to them.

Yours sincerely



D W MELLOY  
Divisional Director Publishing &  
Editor

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Rt Hon Denis MacShane MP



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Doug Melloy  
 Rotherham Advertiser  
 Fitzwilliam Road  
 Rotherham  
 South Yorkshire  
 S65 1JU

20<sup>th</sup> November 2005

*New Doug,*

Quis custodiet ipsos custodies? Who controls the PCC Chairman?

I am writing to you because I think the time has now come for the proprietors, editors and non-press members of the Press Complaints Commission as well as members of its appointments board and finance board and other linked boards to set up their own enquiry into how to handle the continuing controversy over Sir Christopher Meyer's high-profile and high-earning relationship with the industry he is meant to help self-regulate. There seems to be no-one who actually has oversight of the PCC Chair and I hope members of the PCC will take on this duty themselves because the idea of self-regulation inherent in the PCC is under pressure until the position of the PCC chair is resolved. It is not for Sir Christopher to keep making statements that he will not quit because he cannot act as judge in his own case. The PCC leadership needs to take this out of his hands and that of his immediate secretariat and find a way forward. An enquiry should be the first step.

While this enquiry is undertaken I believe public confidence in the PCC requires that Sir Christopher stands down and allows another PCC non-press member to become temporary chair.

I assume of course that PCC member Paul Dacre, (also a member of the Finance Board which appointed Sir Christopher) whose Daily Mail allegedly paid £200,000 to Sir Christopher, will recuse himself from this enquiry.

The Articles of Association of the Press Complaints Commission which give the body legal status and define your duties and responsibilities as PCC or linked board members state clearly that the Chairman should not be involved in the newspaper business. Article 6.2 states:

“The Chairman shall be appointed by PRESSBOF (Press Standards Board of Finance), for such period and upon such terms as PRESSBOF may in its absolute discretion think fit, and PRESSBOF shall be entitled to vary or revoke such appointment. The Chairman shall not be engaged in or, otherwise than by his office as Chairman, connected with or interested in the business of publishing newspapers, periodicals or magazines.”

It is now clear that Sir Christopher has a clear interest in the publication of newspapers by way of the large fees he received from the Daily Mail and the Guardian for the serialization of his memoirs. Moreover, the sales of the book will be greatly promoted by Sir Christopher's involvement with newspapers. It would be helpful if the Daily Mail and the Guardian, in the interests of freedom of information, could provide precise details of the amounts paid and to whom and on what conditions any cheques were paid. It appears that Lady Meyer receives a substantial salary from one of the charities mentioned as possible recipients of the book serialization payments.

There is a further matter of public interest revealed in today's report in the Observer that Sir Christopher traded in shares in an arms exporting company. His book reports that he visited and gave profile to the American plant of the company in question before taking up a non-executive directorship with the company upon retiring with a full Foreign Office pension. Arms exports are also on occasion a sensitive matter which arouse press controversy and I am far from convinced that a PCC Chairman should be speculating in arms industry shares or be linked to an arms exporting company.

The underlying problem remains that Sir Christopher breached the confidence of the many senior people in public life who were his guests at his residence in Washington. Being snobbish about, condescending to, and sneering at those you have had stay under your roof is a matter of personal honour and self-respect.

But given that many in public life do have to have recourse to the PCC when their privacy is invaded, it is hard to see how those who have been treated with contempt and scorn by Sir Christopher in such a public manner can have any confidence in the PCC as long as he is its Chair. I know that is the view of a number of serving and former ministers as well as Labour MPs. Is it really helpful to the PCC to have a chairman who has so lost the confidence in his impartiality and his integrity of people in public life who are often those who have to come to the PCC for help?

I do not know exactly who to ask to intervene on this as I can hardly write to Sir Christopher to ask him to investigate his own financial and other relations with the press. So I hope you as a guardian of the public interest as a member of the PCC or one of its supervisory boards can now take the necessary action. I would be grateful for an early reply I can circulate to MPs who have raised their concerns with me.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Denis MacShane MP

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22 November 2005

Rt Hon Denis MacShane MP  
 House of Commons  
 LONDON  
 SW1A 0AA

Dear

I am in receipt of your letter dated 20 November in which you raise the question of who controls the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, Sir Christopher Meyer, following serialisation of his book, DC Confidential, in the Daily Mail and The Guardian.

The answer, as you acknowledge in your letter, can be found in the Articles of Association of the PCC, which reveal that the chairman is appointed by the Press Standards Board of Finance, to whom he is therefore accountable, and should "not be involved in the newspaper business." I cannot agree with your assertion that because Sir Christopher received payment for serialisation of his book that he is ipso facto "connected with or interested in the business of publishing newspapers..." as defined in Article 6.2 of the Articles of Association of the PCC.

The call from some quarters that Sir Christopher should stand down as chairman of the PCC may be attributed to several motives, but I do not agree that his position as chairman of this independent watchdog is compromised by the publication of his memoirs and their subsequent serialisation in national newspapers.

As you know, the book was cleared, without amendment, by the Cabinet Office in consultation with the Foreign Office in advance of publication and it therefore seems disingenuous of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to disapprove of the book's publication at this late stage. If indeed Sir Christopher had breached confidences, as is now alleged, it was surely at the point where the book could have been blocked, that publication should have been thwarted. As it was, Sir Christopher was invited to go ahead and publish.

However, it is merely setting hares running to suggest that, having written extensively about his tenure as British Ambassador to the United States of America, Sir Christopher would later write another book revealing the background to issues brought before the independent Press Complaints Commission. In fact he has categorically stated that he will not do so.

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As you are aware, the code of practice under which the Press Complaints Commission adjudicates complaints was written by the Editors' Code Committee, of which I have been a member since 1997, and is constantly under review. As a member of that committee I cannot agree with your assertion that Sir Christopher has breached the confidence of many senior people in public life he met while an ambassador, especially when the preamble to the Code specifically protects the rights of the individual and upholds the public's right to know. Furthermore, in defining the public interest the Code expressly states that there is a public interest in the freedom of expression which Sir Christopher has exercised in his memoirs.

Certain sections of the book, in which Sir Christopher makes personal observations about those with whom he came into contact, may make uncomfortable reading for sensitive politicians, but that in itself is hardly sufficient reason to conclude that as a consequence he has undermined the confidence in his impartiality and integrity he previously enjoyed.

I note that you wish to circulate my reply to MPs who have raised their concerns with you and I presume, therefore, that you will not mind if I copy your letter, and my reply to it, to the secretariat of both the PCC and the Editors' Code Committee, as a matter of courtesy.

Yours sincerely

**D W MELLOY**  
 Divisional Director Publishing &  
 Editor

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## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Diane Thomson  
 Chief Executive Camelot Group  
 Head Office  
 Tolpits Lane  
 Watford  
 Herts, WD18 9RN

20<sup>th</sup> November 2005

*Dear Diane,*

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Rt Hon Denis MacShane MP