

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION
From the Chairman

Don Foster Esq MP
Liberal Democrat Shadow Culture,
Media and Sport Secretary
House of Commons
London
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31st May 2006

Jan Jay

Thank you for your letter of 26th May.

Let me assure you that there is no lessening in our determination to stamp out the term "illegal asylum seeker". We continue to monitor its use in any editorial copy published by newspapers in the UK, on – or off-line; and always admonish the editor who allows the term to get into his/her copy. There may be some discrepancies in our respective monitoring methods, since there are examples to which you refer that have not previously been brought to our attention, and vice versa. For example, your research suggests that the Guardian has never used the term. In fact, I wrote to Alan Rusbridger a few weeks ago about the term creeping into his copy, following which a correction was published.

We fully agree with you on the need for accuracy of reporting in this area. We will continue to press upon editors the importance of maintaining standards. This includes the content of readers' letters pages, which are fully covered by the terms of the Code and our Guidance Note.

On fines, I think we must agree to differ. I am resolutely opposed to them. As you will have seen from our recent annual report, we were able to resolve 41% more complaints in 2005 than in 2004 – a total of nearly 400 complaints – precisely because editors were prepared to make the effort to satisfy complainants. They would scarcely do so if the threat of a critical adjudication did not have real teeth. As it stands, what I call the 'naming and shaming' of editors hits them where it hurts the most: their professional pride. The imposition of fines would not – in my view – have the same pointed and personal effect (as the money could become, in essence, an expense to be borne by the editorial budget) or produce a better result for the complainant (being likely to bring with it antagonism and delay to the process).

With kind regards.

Yours ever,



ir Christopher Meyer

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