

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

From the Chairman

John Simpson CBE
World Affairs Editor
BBC Television Centre
Wood Lane
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21st June 2006

Dear John,

I do not know which is more tedious: the snobbish disdain of TV reporters for print journalism; or their plumb ignorance of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and what it does. I am afraid both characteristics were on display in your remarks last week to the Churches' Media Conference.

It is not my job to defend newspapers. But you would do well to look at your own organisation's website for 16th February of this year, where Brendan O'Neill's piece, "Whispering Game", gives the background to the story of the paediatrician, mistaken for a paedophile, whose place was "smashed up". Contrary to what you said to the Churches' Media Conference, there appears to be little evidence that this 6-year-old incident ever happened.

As to the PCC (which replaced The Press Council), we have never been busier or more successful in resolving hundreds of complaints about newspapers and magazines from those with a legitimate grievance, and at no cost. The details are all on our website for those who have an interest in the reality, not the mythology, of self-regulation and the Code of Practice.

There is lots of stuff in the British press, which you and I personally find tasteless and offensive. But it is not my job or yours, still less any regulator's, to impose our respective standards of taste and decency on everyone else. That is censorship.

I liked your footballing metaphor. But you had the wrong teams. It is more like last night's game between England and Sweden: robust, fearless, not always pretty to watch, with a good referee who knew when to let play go on and when to curb the worst excesses. That's the PCC and the press.

*Yours ever,
Christopher*

Sir Christopher Meyer

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