

Statement of James Hanning to the Leveson Inquiry

Introduction

1. My name is James Hanning. I have been a journalist for 25 years and am deputy editor of the Independent on Sunday and co-author of a biography of David Cameron. This book was undertaken in a completely separate capacity from my employment.
2. This statement, in the main, outlines my contact with Sean Hoare, who died in July of this year of liver disease. Any views expressed below are my own and are not put forward on behalf of my newspaper or the company that owns it. I would not normally regard off the record conversations as suitable for public airing, but Sean Hoare's brother Stuart has endorsed my belief that Sean would have wanted what he knew to be known.
3. I also include certain more general observations in relation to journalistic ethics which may be of interest to the Inquiry.
4. Any views expressed below are my own and are not put forward on behalf of my newspaper or the company that owns it. I understand Independent Print Limited has provided written evidence to the Inquiry and the Inquiry will hear evidence of journalists and executives from the Independent and Independent on Sunday in such capacity in due course.

Sean Hoare

5. My interest in phone hacking was sparked by the appointment of Andy Coulson to work for David Cameron in May 2007. In the course of preparing the book I had cause to look into Coulson's resignation statement in January 2007, when he stood down as editor of the News of the World. With the Independent on Sunday

in mind, I continued to take an interest in the affair, and spoke to a number of people who had worked at the News of the World.

6. I was given the name of Sean Hoare as somebody who had known a number of senior people at the News of the World, but was told he had gone to ground. Eventually, with some help, I got hold of him, and we first met in the summer of 2010. I would say I met him subsequently four or five times, but we spoke frequently. He seemed to me to be the proverbial 'rough diamond', in that he had done a lot of drugs with some famous people, but he indicated that that was the way things worked at the coalface of redtop showbiz journalism. He struck me as likeable and loyal to his friends, though he had clearly had difficulties with drugs and drink.
7. He seemed aggrieved at the treatment he had received from the News of the World but was concerned not to be named in public. I inferred, in part then and in part subsequently, that this was partly to do with the paper's treatment of his drugs problem. Sean felt he had been used for his story-getting skills and not treated with the right degree of gratitude.
8. He seemed to recognise that much of what he had done was less than saintly, but he seemed to have few pretensions about the sort of journalism he was involved in. He was what you might call an old-fashioned story-getter who didn't like hypocrites but who also believed that papers were soon yesterday's chip paper. But he was quite hierarchical in his thinking, it struck me, so that where he did get judgmental was that he felt it was wrong that someone who had worked on the News of the World when questionable practices were going on could be working alongside the Prime Minister.
9. He told me several times how careful he had to be because he didn't want to end up facing charges himself. Several times he told me that he wanted to do a deal with the police whereby they offered him immunity, but he gave me to understand the police were not interested.

10. He believed that certain people were brought onto the staff of certain newspapers because of their acquaintance with the hacking of phones and other such techniques. He was a great source of stories about the extent of phone hacking that were very hard to stand up, but which I believed to be true. He also seemed happy to be called as a source of reference, to provide context about individuals. He seemed astonished that something he said was so widespread was so little known about. We talked about possibly writing a book together.

General Observations

11. I have also been asked if I have any suggestions that might be of interest to the Inquiry. I should emphasise that I have no special expertise in this area and, again, I speak in an entirely personal capacity. There are a couple of other aspects of journalism that might be worthy of Lord Leveson's consideration.

12. One is a suggestion for journalists to consider when they are thinking of doing something unethical. There are instances, I would submit, where the cutting of corners is defensible. The Guardian's famous 'cod fax' that exposed Jonathan Aitken's dealings with Mohamed al-Fayed would be one example of that. That was probably the only way his dishonesty could be exposed. Similarly I doubt if the Pakistani cricketers could have been exposed without a great deal of subterfuge and the Independent's recent exposure of the role of lobbyists and the wrongdoing at Alder Hey required what I would think of as excusable subterfuge, which was not of course against the law in any event.

13. May I suggest a test that a journalist should set him or herself? If you, the journalist, think you need to bend the rules, when you come to write this story, will you be willing to tell the reader how you got the story? If a breach of the usual propriety is claimed to be in the public interest, surely the public is entitled make a judgement at the time of reading the story if that is indeed the case? Phone hacking is generally the antithesis of this: the public is not told it has happened, and generally it is done to secure a story of

highly debatable public interest (in the grander sense). Under this test, fishing expeditions, if the truth is told, admittedly, become impossible.

14. Second: copy approval. Increasingly newspapers seem willing to play the PR game beyond any defensible extent. Certainly celebrities will only give interviews as long as they can check not just their quotes (to ensure against misquotation) but also the whole of the article. This means that the supposedly 'free press' becomes a branch of the publicity machine. This may or may not be acceptable, but if the former, surely this should be stated somewhere. (This is the same principle that applies to an 'advertising feature' – where the interest is declared.)

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed ..

Dated:14-12-11.....