

The toddler of press regulation hits the 'terrible twos'

08 SEPTEMBER 2015

Amber Melville-Brown

PARTNER | US

CATEGORY:

[BLOG](#)

Today is the one year anniversary of IPSO, the Independent Press Standards Organisation. It was set up after the Leveson report found that under the self-regulation system, the press had for years, decades, been 'marking its own homework'. What was needed after the horrors of the phone hacking debacle was an independent regulator that inspired the confidence of the public. The word 'independent' is in the title; the IPSO website says that it is 'the independent regulator of the newspaper and magazine industry'. But one year on, and public confidence in IPSO is sadly lacking. Hacked Off was set up to campaign for an inquiry into press ethics and then it campaigned to have Parliament accept the Leveson recommendations and deliver a framework for the implementation of the Leveson reforms. It has been peppered with celebrities — Hugh Grant and Steve Coogan to name two — but also supported by the voices of 'civilians' mistreated at the hands of the media. It has been campaigning for four years but, according to many, that mistreatment goes on and on. Dr Evan Harris, joint director of the Hacked Off campaign, has described IPSO as 'the PCC but with added deceit'. He was speaking with other protestors at a Hacked Off rally outside the offices of IPSO on Farringdon Street today to mark another year of failed press regulation. Caroline Thompson and I, acting as we do for phone hacking victims and going into battle on a daily basis with the press on behalf of our clients, went along to show our support. Hacked Off — like 66% of the public according to a YouGov survey for the organisation — has little or no confidence in the non-Leveson compliant regulator which is what IPSO is. What Hacked Off and the public want is a press regulator that will take brave decisions and act independently, not afraid to bite the hand that feeds when it is in the interests of justice to do so. But Brian Cathcart, founder of Hacked Off, told the protestors that IPSO hadn't even been smart enough to make a 'show' of making robust decisions in its first year. While the disgraced Press Complaints Commission (PCC) had failed, IPSO was now 'arrogant enough' said Evan Harris, to think that it could get away with similar behaviour. And there is perhaps every reason for it to be arrogant. There is a smattering of non-media folk on the board of IPSO, but the press credentials of the rest shine through oh so brightly. The five-strong appointments panel that appoints this independent board includes: (1) IPSO's own chairman; (2) the editor of Devon Life; and (3) Group-Editor-in-Chief at Trinity Mirror. The national newspapers — save for The Guardian, the Independent and the Financial Times — and myriad magazines and local titles have signed up to IPSO. Today's protestors were told that 'respectable' papers such as The Guardian were being put under pressure by those within the IPSO media family to add their name to the list for reasons of 'solidarity'. When the time comes and should these titles start to wobble, he said that a polite protest might be called for outside the offices of those papers, to ask them carefully to consider their actions. Because the press — or at least a responsible press — should have nothing to fear from real independent regulation. Indeed, the protesting crowd included journalists and film makers, and Polly Toynbee, columnist for The Guardian (brave enough to stand up as a journalist in front of the admittedly very polite and well-behaved crowd) said that proper regulation could even protect journalists. Giving evidence to the Leveson enquiry, in what seems like a lifetime ago now, Rupert Murdoch said that it was the most 'humble' day of his life. One would expect things to have changed for the better in the last four years. But as if in a scene from a rather scary movie, one red-headed ghost from the past has come back to life. Murdoch's new appointee Rebekah Brooks, cleared by a criminal court of wrongdoing in the hacking affair, is back with her feet under the Murdoch empire desk. In her new role this week as chief executive of News UK — publisher of The Sun and The Times — she should be in a prime position to use her renown and his soap box to ensure that no editor or publishing mogul need feel so humbled again — by backing an independent, Leveson-compliant regulator; and by requiring her staff to engage in responsible, independently audited journalism. But this is a factual blog, not fiction... We all know that youngsters can behave badly, and after all, IPSO is only a year old. But before we get too excited at the idea of things getting better as IPSO gets older and wiser, just remind yourself that IPSO is now heading into 'the terrible twos'...

Authors

Amber Melville-Brown

PARTNER | NEW YORK

Media and reputation

 +1 212 848 9813 (NY) +44 20 7597 6408 (London)

 amber.melville-brown@withersworldwide.com