

Perfidy, Sanctimony and Humbug

Comments by James Goldsmith following the Press Council's adjudication on Goldsmith v Gillard

THE PRESS COUNCIL has delivered its judgement on a series of articles published by The Observer, starting June 27, 1982.

In its adjudication the Press Council states, inter alia:

'The complaint (i.e. by James Goldsmith) against The Observer is upheld.'

'So far as the first story is concerned (i.e. the Calvi story) the Press Council cannot accept that pressure of time can excuse the publication of so significant an inaccuracy, which in the context and by the conclusion drawn from it, reflects unfavourably on someone's reputation.'

'The Press Council finds that Sir James Goldsmith's name was unjustifiably introduced into both stories.'

'It takes the view that an intention in the writing of both stories was to embarrass Sir James Goldsmith by innuendo.'

The Press Council could not have adjudicated otherwise because, in independent legal actions, the facts as stated by me have been confirmed in the High Court. It was proven and admitted that there has been an orchestrated and 'intense campaign' of vilification based on lies. It was acknowledged in the High Court that the Calvi story was 'typical' of this campaign and a 'total fabrication.'

From the outset, I stated that my purpose in bringing these actions was not merely to expose The Observer, Mr Michael Gillard and his associates. It was to improve the workings of the Press Council, which I believe to be incapable of acting in a sound, unbiased and effective manner.

So it comes as no surprise that the Press Council's statement, notwithstanding the adjudication in my favour, is the usual nauseous blend of perfidy, sanctimony and humbug. Let me explain:

1. Council states that 'Mr Gillard and Sir James Goldsmith are old courtroom, column and Press Council antagonists.' This statement suggests a kind of similarity in the position of the parties. Let us be quite clear as to the facts that have emerged during the cases in the courtroom and before the Press Council :

- A jury unanimously concluded that I was justified in describing Mr Gillard as a blackmailer.
- The Court of Appeal and the House of Lords maintained the jury's verdict.
- Mr Gillard has been proven to be a liar and propagandist posing as a journalist.

One of the principal duties of the Press Council is 'to maintain the character of the British press in accordance with the highest professional and commercial standards.' Yet the Press Council fails to give any guidance as to whether it considers it compatible with these high standards, that The Observer, Private Eye and The World in Action of Granada TV programme should, in future, supply a platform to a man with such a proven record.

2. The Council's statement implies that the proven campaign of smear by innuendo and lie was the result of the action of one isolated journalist with a personal animus. In fact, it has

been demonstrated that at least five journalists were involved in this single mini-campaign of disinformation.

The Press Council claims a right hitherto claimed (as far as I know) by no court of any kind in this country. They claim the right to impose a blanket injunction against repetition of anything said during its proceedings. The courts of law sometimes grant injunctions to prevent complaints being repeated. But this is infrequent, particularly when freedom of speech is involved. It is on this basis that the Press Council criticises me for distributing to third parties the substance of my complaint.

It is grotesque and wholly unacceptable that the quasi-judicial body whose duty is to protect freedom of speech, should seek to impose a gag on those who appear before it. There are other reasons why I refused to be gagged by the Press Council. Here is one among many:

- despite the pretense that the so called independent members of the Press Council are independently appointed, the reality is that the Council's officials control these appointments. That is why it is significant and deeply worrying that, as uncovered by me and since conceded to be true, a member of the Press Council, Mrs Beryl Huffinley, is a prominent Communist Party activist and a member of a number of Soviet front organisations. It is unlikely that she was appointed to the Press Council without some help. Clearly the Press Council would have preferred a cover-up, and they state that I 'sought to impugn the integrity of a public member of the Press Council.'

Again I remind the Press Council that its principal duty is to protect 'the established freedom of the British Press.'

Communism is the antithesis of freedom of speech.

It is impossible for a Communist Party activist to be a sincere member of a council whose duty is to protect freedom of speech. In Communist countries, the press is the censored, servile and corrupt tool of totalitarian regimes.

Does the Press Council, by criticising me for revealing its Communist membership, suggest that it is right and proper for a prominent Communist Party activist and a member of a number of Soviet front organisations, also to be a member of the British Press Council?

4. The Press Council states that I 'canvassed' their members by sending to them copies of my evidence. It condemns me for doing so. It seems that the officials of the Press Council want to restrict the free flow of information even to its own members. They seem to have forgotten what freedom is all about. In fact, I distributed the evidence very widely so as to shatter the censorship that the Press Council was attempting to impose on the proceedings. Only in this way did I feel that the Press Council would act with a modicum of fairness.

Of course, it is delightfully whimsical of the Press Council to suggest that I was 'canvassing' their members for support. Continuously, I repeated to them that I considered the Press Council 'polluted and discredited'; that its members should be sacked and that the whole infected contraption be dismantled. An unusual way to 'canvass' for support.

5. Interestingly, the Press Council makes no comment on the fact that Mr Donald Trelford, Editor of The Observer, lied during his testimony. The Council does not reprimand Mr Telford for doing so. Is this because the Council's self-respect has fallen so low that it expects to be treated in this way? Or does it consider it unimportant or perhaps normal that the Editor of The Observer should bear false witness? Is this compatible with the 'highest professional standards' that the Press Council is supposed to maintain?

Parliament must legislate to rid us of this shameful and farcical organisation. If not, it will be the freedom of the press, and therefore freedom itself, which will suffer.