

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

From the Chairman

19 December 2006

Lord Soley of Hammersmith
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

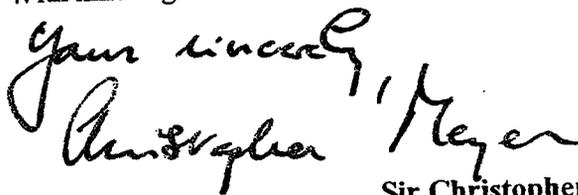


Thank you for your letter about the Information Commissioner's report, *What price privacy now?*

I am grateful to you for contacting me before you raise the matter in the House of Lords. It seems to me that there are a number of points that need to be borne in mind. The first is that I have – as the report makes clear – repeatedly condemned breaches of the Data Protection Act by journalists when there is no public interest. I will continue to do so publicly and robustly. The second is that the material that the Information Commissioner has gathered for this report, so far as it relates to journalists, is over four years old and precedes my time chairing the PCC. The third is that, from what I can tell, there is no indication in the report that all or any of the newspapers cited had breached the Data Protection Act, let alone whether they might be able to invoke any public interest defence. The use of enquiry agencies is not in itself a breach either of the law or of the Code of Practice. The fourth is that the PCC enforces the terms of the press Code of Practice and not the law. There are already legal remedies available for alleged breaches of the DPA. My own suggestion would be to use them in such circumstances.

I do not see my role as sticking up for the press against the public. Far from it. However – regardless of the specifics of this case – the fact that many people are increasingly concerned about encroachments on press freedom can scarcely be ignored either.

With kind regards.



Sir Christopher Meyer

CHAIRMAN
Sir Christopher Meyer

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