May vows to defend free press after Lords push for inquiry

Matthew Moore Media Correspondent
Patricia Maguire
Theresa May has criticised peers for voting to change the Leveson inquiry, saying the plans would "undermine high-quality journalism and a free press."

"I think it would particularly have a negative impact on local newspapers, and it is an important underpinning of our democracy."

"I believe passionately in a free press. With those principles at stake, I will continue to fight to hold politicians and others to account and we will certainly be looking to the government to launch the second phase of the Leveson inquiry into press standards."

The Lords also voted in favour of a separate set of amendments that would enable local councils to use local authority funds to fund legal challenges to the proposals.

"I think that the impact of this vote would undermine high-quality journalism and a free press."

The first phase of the Leveson inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the UK newspaper industry was published in 2012 with the publication of the Leveson report. The newspaper industry argues that the proposals for a second phase, into the relationship between the press, police and politicians, is now unnecessary given improved media standards and the financial pressures facing publishers.

The government announced in June a consultation on the issue last year, with a decision expected shortly.

"The government tabled in the Lords by Baroness Hollins would force the government to establish a similar inquiry that would exclude police and politicians, letting them off the hook."

MATT HANCOCK, new Culture Secretary, has promised to introduce a "hammer blow" to local newspapers.

The News Media Association, which represents newspapers, said: "Legislation intended to make our data protection laws fit for the digital age should be used as a backdoor route by peers to enforce state-back press regulation and obstruct investigative journalism."

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Teenager wins payout from Facebook over naked posts

Farhia Karim

Facebook will pay compensation to a 14-year-old girl in a landmark legal action over naked pictures of her that were allegedly posted on the publishing site.

The legal team for the girl, from Northern Ireland, opened High Court proceedings after she said that her photograph had been posted on a Facebook page several times between November 2014 and January 2015.

She sought damages for misuse of private information, negligence and breach of contract, claiming that the image was obtained after she was blackmailed and published with threats.

In a move that could prompt similar claims, Facebook set up a confidential out-of-court settlement.

Pearse MacDermott, from McCann and McCann Solicitors, said that police delays in handling the case had meant that officers were unable to prosecute the person who posted the images, which caused a "detrimental effect" to the girl's mental health.

That is why her family decided to seek legal redress, Mr MacDermott said, adding that the settlement had raised the issue of social media providers being treated as publishers or other types of media.

"Had these images been put in a newspaper or on a naked picture of her being posted on the site, it is inconceivable that any serious repercussions and those same repercussions should also apply to whatever platform is used in the social media world," Mr MacDermott said.

The case moves the goal post because Facebook argues that it was up to the individual user to be responsible for their content. It is "shame it has got to the point where the provider is responsible for the content on their platform," he said.

"Whenever an image is put up that is clearly objectionable they should be able to stop it ever being put up again. They should use the technology they have to be responsible provider and remove the offensive posts."

He added that he hoped the Police Service of Northern Ireland had learnt from the case and would in future "act with more haste" when dealing with similar cases.

Five days had been set aside for the civil trial but Edward Fitzgerald QC, for the girl, told the court on Tuesday that the case had been settled and Facebook will also pay her legal costs.

Lorry companies cheating emission rules

GRAEME PATON Transport Correspondent

Lorry operators are routinely fitting HGVs with cheat devices to allow vehicles to produce emissions lower than their roadworthiness certificates, according to a government investigation has found.

Figures published today show that one in 12 lorries examined by Environment Agency vehicle examiners contained illegal emissions systems.

The most common device was an "emulator" that bypasses the vehicle's emissions systems. Lorries are fitted with engine management devices that detect when it produces high emissions and tinker with it as a result of repair. However, unscrupulous operators are believed to have fitted crude gadgets to make engine systems think "clean" when they are not.

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) began checks in August to detect lorries with high emissions systems. During the.scheme, 1,375 lorries on strategic routes in four months and found that 293 of these vehicles had some form of emissions fraud device fitted. Cheating was more prevalent among British hauliers. About 8.5 percent of UK-based vehicles checked had the device, compared with 4.9 percent of foreign HGVs. Drivers or operators of these vehicles have to remove the device and install genuine emissions systems within days. Those that continue to operate vehicles that have not been fixed face a £300 fine and will have their vehicles taken away.

HGV operators can also be subject to an investigation to check whether vehicles in the rest of their fleet are being fitted with cheat devices. More than 100 investigations are continuing.

"We monitored the DVSA chief executive, said: "We are committed to taking dangerous lorries off Britain's roads. Stopping emissions fraud is a vital part of that. Anyone who flouts the law is setting the quality of our air and the health of vulnerable people at risk."