



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

3 February 1981

Dear Mr. Forsyth,

Thank you for your letter of 8 January suggesting the need for public figures and others to be protected from inaccurate press reporting and invasion of privacy. Let me say at once that I, too, deplore these press reports, and appreciate how distressing they can be to the people featured in them.

As you know, newspaper editors are free to publish what they wish so long as it is within the law. When reports are objectionable on grounds of taste or decency, a complaint can be made to the Press Council. The Council was set up by the newspaper industry for the purpose, among other things, of maintaining the highest professional and commercial standards in the press.

I entirely share your feelings about the need for these standards to be maintained and I realise from your letter that you don't think the Press Council measures up to its task. But equally it is of crucial importance to keep the press in this country free from Government interference.

The real problem is that we are dealing with newspaper accounts that fall short of libel but which offend all professional codes of ethics. I just do not think it is possible to draft a law to deal with these matters. We are therefore driven to rely on a body like the Press Council to censure this activity and indeed there have been times when

/ the Council

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the Council has been forthright in doing so. As the Royal Commission on the Press recommended, questions of press conduct must be left to the influence of the Press Council.

There is one other factor - public opinion. In some recent cases, I believe it has made itself felt. The criticisms which have been voiced by prominent figures have found a ready echo in the response of many people. The real sanction of course is not to buy the offending paper or magazine. Alas, while some condemn, many continue to read those very columns which you and I find so distasteful.

All good wishes.

Yours sincerely  
Raymond D. ...

Bruce Forsyth, Esq.