

Oborne on democracy

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Peter Oborne, like Simon Jenkins, can be a deeply annoying right wing commentator. And also an exceptionally good writer who sometimes delivers an exceptionally good argument. And now he has resigned from the Telegraph with profound reasons stated in an article on Open Democracy. [This is part of what he said:](#)

This brings me to a second and even more important point that bears not just on the fate of one newspaper but on public life as a whole. A free press is essential to a healthy democracy. There is a purpose to journalism, and it is not just to entertain. It is not to pander to political power, big corporations and rich men. Newspapers have what amounts in the end to a constitutional duty to tell their readers the truth.

It is not only the Telegraph that is at fault here. The past few years have seen the rise of shadowy executives who determine what truths can and what truths can't be conveyed across the mainstream media. The criminality of News International newspapers during the phone hacking years was a particularly grotesque example of this wholly malign phenomenon. All the newspaper groups, bar the magnificent exception of the Guardian, maintained a culture of omerta around phone-hacking, even if (like the Telegraph) they had not themselves been involved. One of the consequences of this conspiracy of silence was the appointment of Andy Coulson, who has since been jailed and now faces further charges of perjury, as director of communications in 10 Downing Street.

And he added:

From the start of 2013 onwards stories critical of HSBC were discouraged. HSBC suspended its advertising with the Telegraph. Its account, I have been told by an extremely well informed insider, was extremely valuable. HSBC, as one former Telegraph executive told me, is "the advertiser you literally cannot afford to offend". HSBC today refused to comment when I asked whether the bank's decision to stop advertising with the Telegraph was connected in any way with the paper's investigation into the Jersey accounts.

With his started consequence:

An editorial operation that is clearly influenced by advertising is classic appeasement. Once a very powerful body know they can exert influence they know they can come back and threaten you. It totally changes the relationship you have with them. You know that even if you are robust you won't be supported and will be undermined.

And conclusion:

There are great issues here. They go to the heart of our democracy, and can no longer be ignored.

I agree. The fight against neo-feudalism has to stretch from left to right.

I admire Peter Osborne, even if I don't always agree with him.