

Murdoch at Leveson

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

First let me put my personal opinion across that - the one time I met Rupert Murdoch (we shared a 3 hour Concorde flight together - side by side; he moved across the aisle, leaving his wife Anna to sleep, and we chatted at length) I found him charming, intelligent, attractive, amusing and pleasant.

I also wrote a page in The Sun every week for almost ten years which coincided with the biggest circulation for the paper and, I believe, its years as a first class tabloid paper.

My time at The Sun was when Rupert defied the unions and moved from Fleet Street to Wapping; I was thoroughly in favour of his actions, indeed, I think he saved the British press at that time. I watched lazy, fat, beer swilling print workers play cards and bank salaries for doing nothing.

The move was also done extremely well. I openly crossed picket lines (though my job really didn't require physical presence at Wapping) deliberately to show my support.

Somehow he managed, without dropping a page or an issue, to continue The Sun, Times and News of the World and to sell millions of papers.

I never had any editorial interference - I thought Kelvin MacKenzie was a superb Editor - except quite frequent praise (often in the middle of the night) and occasional criticism ("dreadful column this week JK - can you do another one please"). So my decade on The Sun was a very happy, well paid and well treated one.

I have also, of course, often been pilloried and smeared by the News International papers - par for the course, that was how they worked - no complaints.

As for the morality of the tabloids... there is a lot I have hated since I was a boy. I remember a dreadful "dogging" type wife swap scandal in the 50s which provoked the suicide of a couple; I was so horrified I vowed to shut down the News of the World during my lifetime. But The People, Mirror, Sketch, Mail, Star and others were all as bad. It's a British thing.

So unequivocally I would say Rupert Murdoch is no more or less responsible for the bad side of tabloid journalism than anyone else.

The fact is - News International, being a very successful company, has probably created more bad examples than anyone else. But we miss the point if we try to demonise Murdoch. This may not be a popular thing to say but the problems in the media reflect the problems in British society and in the human species, which may be why we seek to find an individual to shoulder the blame.