ANDREW MARR: Last week was a pretty momentous, indeed theatrical one, at the Leveson Inquiry as well - that inquiry into press standards. It started with a very senior police officer talking of a “culture of illegal payments” at the defunct News of the World. Quite separately, another Sun journalist has been arrested. All this is shining a powerful light on the behaviour of the media and the police, and ultimately of course politicians are going to have to decide what to do about all of this. I’m joined now by Labour’s Deputy Leader Harriet Harman. Thank you for coming in. How serious do you regard the stuff that’s coming out of the Leveson Inquiry? Corruption, do you think, at the police level, corruption in journalism? Is that a fair word to use?

HARRIET HARMAN: I think it’s immensely serious, and the important thing is to make sure that the problems that have been so evidenced before the Leveson Inquiry are dealt with. We’ve seen clear allegations that there’s been bribery of the police by the newspapers. Now we pride ourselves in being a non-corrupt country, and yet the police of all public services being subjected to bribery and corruption. We’ve seen …

ANDREW MARR:
Well not just being subjected. Taking it happily clearly.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Indeed, indeed, being corrupted.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yuh.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
We’ve also seen the hacking of a murdered girl’s phone, and having been told for years that this is just one rogue reporter, it appears that it was systematic, illegal hacking. Now the point about all of this is that we must make sure that we have a press in this country which is not above the law, which doesn’t corrupt public officials to break the law, and which respects their own journalist code because we’ve got a great tradition of British journalism. We want to make sure that we protect that tradition and that we sort matters out. And for years these concerns have been expressed and there’s never been that moment where actually it could be sorted.

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) Because all you politicians … I was saying all you politicians. Many politicians have been too scared, frankly, of the big media barons to take them on.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well I think that that’s right. What’s happened is that Murdoch has been too powerful and has played divide and rule, and what we now have is that opportunity to actually sort this out. And what we want is just enforcement of the law, protection for individuals, and also never allowing so much media power to go into the hands of one individual, so that he plays one party off against the other and really puts himself above the law and above government.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So I started off by saying in the end all this lands up in the laps of politicians. So are you saying you want to see two things? You want to see another look at diversity of ownership of the British media, first of all?
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think it’s evident. If you’ve got one man owning the four major newspapers - Times, Sunday Times, Sun, News of the World - that is too much. Thirty-seven per cent of the newspapers owned by one man, that was obviously too powerful. Now Ofcom, the regulator, is doing an inquiry into whether we should change the rules to prevent monopolies growing across media. We need to look at newspapers as well, and we also need to look at the enforcement of the press complaints code which has been really quite toothless.

ANDREW MARR:
Is your instinct that you would want to see, you would not want to see state regulation of the press, however?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think we need to see better regulation of broadcasting and that’s being looked at by Ofcom. But in relation to the newspapers, I think the newspaper editors giving evidence to Leveson, they’ve said we must have independent redress for complaints. It can’t be the newspaper editors marking their own homework, deciding … you know making themselves judge and jury. But also it must apply to everyone. It can’t just be something that you have to opt into. All newspapers must be covered by the code and it must be enforceable. And the problem with what Lord Hunt, the Press Complaints Commission Chair is proposing, is it still allows an editor to decide well I’m not going to play ball with that …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay …

HARRIET HARMAN:
… I’m going to stay outside that system.

ANDREW MARR:
Right.
HARRIET HARMAN:
And that’s not acceptable.

ANDREW MARR:
There is a big dilemma here, however, isn’t there, which is if you do have legally enforceable and statutory regulation, you have political regulation in a way …

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well no …

ANDREW MARR:
… and no-one seems to have come up with a way around that yet.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think that obviously you need independence - independence from the newspaper editors. They can’t judge when they themselves are being held to account.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But also independent …

HARRIET HARMAN:
(over) But nobody wants political or governmental determination of what the newspapers do, so the challenge is to make sure that we have a system that applies to everyone in terms of all the newspapers and actually which is independent of government and the editors. And of course I can work out what I think the solution to it is, but I’m a politician. It’s much better if actually the newspaper editors themselves say these are the principles we all agree on and here’s our proposal of how it can be made to work in practice and, therefore, we can then enact it.

ANDREW MARR:
So do you think that the opposition, the government can come together on this, work together, find a consensus in parliament?
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think we should do. I think that no political party … If you believe in the rule of law, if you believe in the sovereignty of the people in democracy, it’s in all of our interests to get this sorted out. And one of the ironies is, is that Murdoch has played divide and rule. The question is can we actually on the back of all the evidence that’s come out of Leveson, can we say right now is the historic moment where we actually agree together that we’re going to sort this out in the interests of a free press and our democracy?

ANDREW MARR:
Do you have any sympathy with those journalists who say these extremely aggressive dawn raids and so on by the police are an overreaction by police who are really guilty themselves and have finally come into the spotlight and are taking it out on some of the journalists they used to have dealings with?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I don’t want to comment on the operational actions of the police. They have to carry this out and do this investigation without fear or favour. But I think that where there has been evidence of illegality, there must be prosecutions and people must be held to account. But beyond that, we need a framework which actually sorts out a problem …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

HARRIET HARMAN:
… that everybody’s known for years has been going on and has never been dealt with, which has been corrupting our democracy.

ANDREW MARR:
Can I ask you about one other story, which is in the papers today, which is reports that there is going to be … there is a possible deal inside the coalition which would allow, maybe as early as the budget, a cut in the 50p higher rate of tax - that coming back down again - and in return some kind of mansion tax to apply? What would be
Labour’s attitude to that?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well you only pay 50p on income over £150,000. And if you’re on over £150,000, I think that you can afford that. You’re not worried about the cost of filling up your car or whether you can pay your next gas and electricity bill. And the irony when in April the cuts in tax credit for low income working families is going to come into effect, that there should be even any discussion at reducing the tax liability of those on income over £150,000, I think it’s grossly unfair. I also … I mean we’ve got our macroeconomic concern that the cuts are too far too fast, they’re stifling economic growth which could help reduce the deficit, but also there’s the fairness issue. Really the people who should be paying most are those who can most afford it, not those on lower incomes.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay. One other issue. You were the Equalities Minister who steered a lot of the equalities legislation through in the Labour years. When the Roman Catholic Cardinal says, as he has in this morning’s paper, that wanting to have gay marriage, same sex marriage and using the word “marriage” is one step too far and is taking a word which has had a historic understanding for hundreds and hundreds of years and twisting it and warning that there’s going to be a real fight about this, do you have any sympathy for that position at all?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well we’ve had prejudice, discrimination and homophobia for hundreds and hundreds of years. It doesn’t make it right. And I think to have civil partnerships of same sex couples and to be able to have marriages, I think that that’s right. And I don’t like the edge …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) Do you think it’s a prejudiced and …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
I don’t want anybody to feel that this is a licence for whipping up prejudice. I think that, yes, there’s a public policy discussion; we’re clear where we stand on it. But I
think that what you’re talking about is individual peoples and their personal relationships, their love for each other and their wanting to be in a partnership or getting married, and I think we should support that.

**ANDREW MARR:**

So what did you make of the actual language that you read this morning?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

Well I hope that it won’t have the affect of fuelling or legitimising prejudice and discrimination. Although we’ve made a great many strides towards a fairer society, I think that we’ve still got a long way to go, so I don’t want this to be pulling things back.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Alright. Harriet Harman, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**