ANDREW MARR: After months of taking evidence from celebrities and many other victims of phone hacking and press harassment, Lord Justice Leveson is pondering his recommendation. Campaigners against media intrusion hope he’s going to call for a powerful new independent body backed by law to regulate the newspapers and punish any wrongdoing. Newspaper editors and many others are equally alarmed by the idea of the state interfering in what you choose to read. The actor Hugh Grant has become a leading figure in the ‘Hacked Off’ campaign for tougher regulation and he joins me now. Welcome.

HUGH GRANT: Thank you. Good morning.

ANDREW MARR: Now you appeared in the Mail on Sunday, as we’ve just heard this morning; I’ve appeared in newspapers, etcetera. Can we agree that people who are well known and behave perhaps slightly foolishly in public deserve all they get … pretty much?

HUGH GRANT:
On the whole, yes, I mean certainly I have no problem with that piece of tittle-tattle.

**ANDREW MARR:**
No, no. So the question here is you’re concerned, you’re worried about how the Prime Minister is going to respond to whatever Leveson suggests?

**HUGH GRANT:**
That’s right. You know in the wake of, well in the middle of that great public outcry about what happened to Milly Dowler, the Prime Minister quite rightly set up a huge public inquiry, and then we heard at that inquiry an avalanche of really terrifying evidence about the hacking of the phones of murder victims or of victims of the 7/7 bombings or of the families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan, which you were just talking about earlier, or of the slandering of people who died at the Hillsborough disaster. And people would think well how could they possibly get away with this, and the answer turned out to be in more evidence that the police had been somewhat compromised; that money had changed hands, and that government had turned the other way and whistled while all this was going on because of fear for their votes - they don’t want the papers turning against them - and because (in some cases) of personal fear, that the papers had …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Yes.

**HUGH GRANT:**
… portfolios on individual politicians, ministers, and this has been going on for fifty years. So the Prime Minister then comes to this inquiry and, again quite rightly and admirably, says “I’m appalled by what I’ve heard at this inquiry”, and in the end any new system of regulation to deal with the press has to satisfy not politicians and their chums in the media but has to satisfy victims, ordinary victims - forget the so-called celebrities for now - has to satisfy ordinary victims of these crimes. And that was terrific. But then suddenly, sinisterly, a few weeks ago we start to get weird rumblings from one of his ministers, the Minister for Education, saying Leveson’s a waste of time. The Chairman of the Select Committee of Culture, Media and Sport says Leveson’s a waste of time. We get these odd articles in The Times saying the
government … close sources or reliable sources at No. 10 say the government has already decided not even to listen to Leveson before it’s published and to go with more, yet more self-regulation of the press - a system …

ANDREW MARR:
We should explain …

HUGH GRANT:
… a system that has been proven to fail …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

HUGH GRANT:
… for fifty years and which the victims all have rejected at the Leveson Inquiry. All the victims rejected this plan, including the Dowlers.

ANDREW MARR:
There are two sort of likely possibilities coming out of this, aren’t there?

HUGH GRANT:
Yuh.

ANDREW MARR:
One is what a lot of newspaper editors want, which is a form of self-regulation - not the Press Complaints Commission but a new form of regulation with tougher fines and all the rest of it; and the other is the possibility of something backed by legislation.

HUGH GRANT:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Now you spoke to the Prime Minister last year about this, did you not?
HUGH GRANT:
That’s right.

ANDREW MARR:
And you said, “Will you as Prime Minister undertake to implement whatever Leveson asks?”

HUGH GRANT:
That’s correct.

ANDREW MARR:
And what did he say?

HUGH GRANT:
He said, “If it’s not bonkers, I’ll do it.” And so that’s why these articles in The Times that political experts tell me are impossible that they could exist without a nod and a wink and a go ahead from No. 10 are so worrying to people like the Watsons, the Dowlers, etcetera, and the people who’ve signed up to this letter.

ANDREW MARR:
So what do you say to people in the newspaper industry who say yes terrible things have happened, we need to get our house in order; but the danger of parliament, of politicians being able to regulate what people can read in the newspapers is a real one, it’s something in this country we have resisted throughout our history and we must not take that direction?

HUGH GRANT:
Well there is no-one who has any intention of the state regulating the content of newspapers. That would be as abhorrent to me or to Hacked Off or to any of the victims as it would be to any newspaper man. All that may come out of Leveson is a suggestion for instead of the press regulating themselves - this system which has proven over fifty years again and again to have failed - for there to be an independent regulator, independent of the newspaper industry but also, crucially, independent of
government. So the only bit of statute that might possibly be required would be to set the thing up in the first place because …

**ANDREW MARR:**
More like the Advertising Standards Agency, something like that?

**HUGH GRANT:**
Yes, exactly, and it’s actually the way solicitors are now regulated, it’s the way doctors are now regulated, and they’re not complaining. And it’s a tiny, tiny dab of statute to set this thing up because otherwise the danger is newspaper editors will just say who … what is this, what is this institution, this new body, this new regulator? We’re not doing what you say. We’re not paying you fines. So you just need that tiny dab of statute to set the thing up. And I personally do not see the slightest danger to freedom of expression, freedom of speech from that. I mean, after all …

**ANDREW MARR:**
You see I mean a lot of people would say this is not a tiny piece of legislation. This is a big move because once politicians are involved in setting something up, the next time a newspaper does something that absolutely infuriates them - perhaps gets hold of a disc on which MPs’ expenses are outlined and publishes it or whatever - there will be calls inside parliament to change or tighten up the regulatory system or to have people brought in front of the House of Commons, and you know you are setting down on a slippery slope. It’s a dangerous path.

**HUGH GRANT:**
Yeah, I don’t think anyone really finds that credible as a worry except the newspaper executives themselves. And that’s an important distinction. I say executives because it is only executives. It’s the people interested in making money from journalism or from newspapers that are really worried about this whole thing. Journalists themselves share our concerns. Michelle Stanistreet from the NUJ comes and sits on our panel. She has exactly the same concerns.

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) So it’ll be alright?
HUGH GRANT:
Real working journalists are terrified in their newsrooms. They’re not allowed to write what they want. They have big corporations bearing down on them saying write sixteen stories about Isla…

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

HUGH GRANT:
… you know how terrible Muslims are.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Hugh Grant … I keep wanting to say Prime Minister. (Grant laughs) Hugh Grant, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

HUGH GRANT:
Well thank you. I’m sorry, am I bleeding?

ANDREW MARR:
Only a tiny little bit.

HUGH GRANT:
Okay, well I apologise for bleeding on your show.

ANDREW MARR:
A fight earlier on. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS