JEREMY VINE:
After the phone hacking scandal, there was general agreement in political circles that something must be done to restrain the press from such behaviour in future. But so far there’s no agreement on exactly what. The Prime Minister rejected Lord Leveson’s proposal for a new system of regulation underpinned by law. The Conservatives recently put forward an alternative plan involving a Royal Charter, but does that go any way towards satisfying Labour, who backed Lord Leveson, let alone the victims of press intrusion such as Milly Dowler’s family and the McCanns? Well I’m joined now by Labour’s Deputy Leader and Shadow Culture Secretary. Harriet Harman, good morning to you.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Good morning.

JEREMY VINE:
So let’s talk about Leveson, what seems to be the case, which is that the whole thing is just running into the sand.
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I hope it isn’t running into the sand. I mean it has been going on for a long time though because for a year Lord Leveson conducted his inquiry and then he gave his report three months ago. And we backed the Prime Minister in setting up the Leveson Inquiry and we agreed with him when he said we should all agree to implement the Leveson Inquiry so long as it’s not, as he put it, “bonkers”. It’s clearly sensible and proportionate and we should get on with it.

JEREMY VINE:
He’s had second thoughts clearly, hasn’t he?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well you know I hope he’s not going to have second thoughts and I hope he’s not going to be leant on by some aspects of the press who actually don’t want to implement Leveson. I mean we’ve got to remember what happened to people was absolutely horrible. They were absolutely torn apart by the press.

JEREMY VINE:
And it’s been dealt with, hasn’t it, by the police and so forth?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well no, unfortunately it’s not just a question for the criminal justice system because the press should adhere to their own code of conduct. We’re talking about them being accountable to the standards they themselves set themselves. And actually we’ve got to make sure we don’t have a situation, which has been a problem for decades, which is they’ve had their own code of conduct but they don’t actually abide by it and then people suffer as a result.

JEREMY VINE:
Okay, let’s just talk about what’s actually proposed here because the question is whether, given that Mr Cameron has changed tack somewhat, you just have to say you’ll buy their compromise, and they’re suggesting a kind of PCC Plus, a boosted PCC with what’s called a recognition body set up by royal charter. Well that sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? Why not just say yes to that?
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well we have said because we want to reach all party agreement, we don’t want to have a political argument about this. Lord Leveson said it’s very important that we go forward on the basis of all political parties agreeing, and indeed that’s what the victims of press abuse have also said: don’t have a political fight about it; try and reach agreement. And we have bent over backwards to try and reach agreement. We thought Lord Leveson’s proposal of having a statute to set it all up was sensible, but the Conservatives said they don’t agree with that. So we’ve said …

JEREMY VINE:
So why not a Royal Charter? Why not?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well we’ve said we’ll definitely look at a royal charter, but it can’t be one which drives a coach and horses through Leveson. It’s got to be actually delivering the standards that Leveson set forth. So we will look at a royal charter, we are prepared to reach agreement on it, but not if it waters Leveson down because the press don’t agree, some aspects of the press don’t agree with Leveson and have been leaning on the Prime Minister. (Vine tries to interject) So I think it’s now time for him to you know man up, step forward and actually say yes we’re going to do it, and then we’ll agree with him and we’ll support it.

JEREMY VINE:
Just for a moment on the detail. I mentioned this enhanced PCC and then it’s being looked at constantly by a recognition body, and the recognition body is set up by royal charter. Why don’t you think that makes it sufficiently independent from the press and the politicians?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well it could do, but you’ve got to have some way of preventing ministers tampering with the royal charter because the royal charter is established by the Privy Council and the Privy Council is essentially ministers, so you’ve got to make sure that the press can’t lean on ministers to water it down as it goes along. So that’s something
that they need to address. And also you’ve got to make sure that the press aren’t involved in appointing the body that is going to be auditing them because that would be the same as we’ve got now, which is editors marking their own homework. So there are some changes which need to happen in the government’s proposals which would bring it up to compliance with Leveson and we’re prepared to agree on that, but actually …

**JEREMY VINE:**
But why not compromise on this proposal because otherwise it seems as if it is just not going to happen, is it?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
We have said we are prepared to, instead of going through the statutory route, look at a combination of charter, royal charter and statute. We’ve said we are prepared to do that, but actually it’s got to be Leveson compliant, not watered down. And if you look at it, actually Parliament I think is growing impatient on this. The House of Lords have already voted just to put it all in the statute and I think there would be a majority in the House of Commons as well, but it would be better not to have a vote, push it through with a divided vote. It would be better to reach agreement. So really it’s for the Conservatives now to really you know take this historic opportunity to sort out what has been wrong for decades and we’ll support them if they do that.

**JEREMY VINE:**
We had the McCanns on this programme a couple of weeks ago and it looks as if they weren’t even happy with what Leveson was proposing, but they may not even get anything near that.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well I think it’s our task to make sure that when we’ve got a very good, balanced report by Leveson which will protect victims in the future but pose no challenge to the freedom of the press, that’s what we’ve got to find amongst ourselves, all the political parties, to agree and to implement because you know none of us would want to walk a minute in the shoes of the McCanns or the Dowlers or Abigail Witchall’s family. I mean what happened to them was absolutely terrible and we’ve got a responsibility
and an opportunity to make sure that it doesn’t happen again. You know they gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry and that really cost them to actually have to expose what happened to them all over again. But they did it because they believed they could help bring about change, and that’s what we’ve not got to fail - that responsibility.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Separately you are beginning an audit - is this the right word - of older women in public life, in broadcasting, in business? Just tell us what you’re doing.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
Well there’s a new generation of older women who actually whose lives are very different from their parents, their mothers’ lives in their fifties and sixties, and who actually are in better health, who regard themselves as being equal to men, and are not happy to be told sorry, you’re heading up to past sixty, you must be past it. So I think in public life, that’s very evident - including in broadcasting - where you now and it’s very welcome that you see many young women blazing a trail coming forward. But they kind of disappear out of sight as soon as they reach their fifties, let alone their sixties. So we don’t think that that’s acceptable. It wastes a lot of talent and expertise. It’s discriminatory and women are not going to put up with it. I mean you’re just heading into your prime, Jeremy, heading into your fifties. You’ve got a good twenty years of building up your expertise …

**JEREMY VINE:**
*(over)* I won’t protest that I’m forty-seven at this point, but anyway.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
But if you were a woman, you know you’d feel you’re on borrowed time, and that’s not right. It’s a combination of age and sex discrimination.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Okay, just a question on the economy because we’re coming to this and it’s the big news today. Britain has lost its triple A rating. There is now a huge debate about whether you splurge, you spend more, stimulate the economy - which seems to be the
Labour plan - or whether you have to tackle the deficit and, therefore, cut. Where are you on that?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think that we recognise that the reason why the deficit hasn’t been going down is because the economy hasn’t been growing, and the way you get growth is a one nation approach where you invest in people, in industry, in infrastructure to help the economy grow. And the trouble is that if George Osborne doesn’t understand what is going on and won’t change course, then people face more years of you know will our kids ever be able to get a job, will they be able to move out of home, are we going to see our living standards falling back? And I think really how many more signs does he need before he realises that their economic plan has failed and has made things worse and they need to change course?

JEREMY VINE:
Just talking in the papers review about the BBC and the Savile scandal and the closing chapter here in some ways of what’s been happening. Tie that in with the Rennard issue of the Lib-Dems, completely different story. But do you see a theme there of the way big organisations deal with any allegations that are made?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I think there is. I mean I do hope that as a result of the inquiries that are happening within the BBC, the BBC regains its self-confidence. It’s such an important institution you know backed by everybody in this country and they do need to sort out the management and that’s a job for the new Director General, together with the Chair of the BBC Trust. But there is a feeling of when are we ever going to learn that if allegations are made against people in top positions, that they must not be swept under the carpet, those allegations. They have to be investigated, they have to be looked at independently. You cannot have a situation where people are able to be exploited because the people who were exploiting them were in senior positions and therefore the organisation sort of gathers round them rather than really holds them to account. It’s a kind of when are we ever going to learn situation whether it’s the church, political parties, big organisations like the BBC. People in power cannot be allowed to abuse people who are powerless. And I mean you know obviously I’m not
making any judgements about these allegations, but they have to be properly
investigated and independently investigated because organisations cannot investigate
themselves when it’s powerful people in those organisations who are the subject of
the accusations.

JEREMY VINE:
Harriet Harman, thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS