ANDREW MARR:  
It started with phone hacking and it’s become one of the longest running sagas in newspaper history, but the attempt to set up a new system of press regulation could come to the crunch this week when the Privy Council decides whether to approve the Royal Charter which would underpin it. Most of the biggest newspaper groups are against it and we tried very hard today to get a senior editor or publisher to discuss their case. Nobody was prepared to come on. And so from the politician side, here is Labour’s Deputy Leader, Harriet Harman, who speaks for the party on media matters. Harriet Harman, thank you very much for joining us. Is this it as far as the Government’s concerned… as far as the politicians are concerned? This is the last offer?

HARRIET HARMAN:  
Well I think so. I mean remember we had this long public inquiry under Lord Justice Leveson because of the terrible things that had happened to individuals like the Dowlers and the McCanns who’d been victims of crime and they’d had their lives turned upside down by the press. And the question was: how do you make sure you have a proper complaints system? And what he suggested is that politicians should set up a framework, but that the press should then come forward with a self-regulatory
system which is just checked once every three years. So we’ve done our bit and come up with the framework and now really the ball’s in the court of the press to come forward with a press regulator to deal with complaints.

ANDREW MARR:
But, as you know, the press are going to pick up the ball and walk away with it. They’re saying we’ll have nothing to do with this. I’m wondering what is the stick? What happens if now we just have a standoff where you’ve got your Royal Charter and your Royal Commission and all of that and the press are doing their own system and simply ignoring what the politicians have said?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well I hope there won’t be a standoff and I hope they won’t just simply walk away from it …

ANDREW MARR:
But they’re going to …

HARRIET HARMAN:
… because what we’re … we can’t …

ANDREW MARR:
… I think. Aren’t they?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well everybody’s agreed that the status quo, which was not a proper complaints system, has failed. Everybody’s agreed it’s failed. And what’s happened in the past when that’s happened is that the press have said okay, we’ll sort it out ourselves, leave us to it, and then a few years later they slip back. So all this is doing is just making sure that when they sort out a new press complaints system, it doesn’t slip back, and therefore they really should come forward with this new system and allow it to be really just signed off once every three years. But …

ANDREW MARR:
I just come back to my original question …

HARRIET HARMAN:
(over) Yes. But if they don’t …

ANDREW MARR:
But if they don’t, what?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Yeah, well if they don’t … I mean I’m absolutely certain that some publisher or another will come forward, establish a regulator which has got a complaints system, which is then recognised and sort of authorised, and then that switches on a system of incentives and disincentives. And that’s the framework that was suggested by Leveson, so you know there will be disincentives …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So if I’m the publisher of the Accrington Bugle and I say right, I’m going to stand up to your system, that creates automatically a new legal situation, does it?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Yes, what it does is it switches on the incentives and disincentives because at that point any newspaper could join the regulator …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So tell me about the incentives and disincentives. I’m now the Sunday Times and I say I’m still not having anything to do with you.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well the incentives are that actually you can have arbitration of complaints against your newspaper, which is cheaper and quicker than actually having the civil court. So that, to the newspapers, you won’t have to be tied up …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) And the disincentives?
HARRIET HARMAN:
Well the disincentives are that actually if you don’t sign up to the regulator and somebody’s got a complaint that then ends up in court because it’s libel or a breach of privacy which is a breach of the civil law, then you won’t be able to claim your costs against the other side. So there’s a cost penalty and you might even have to pay the other side’s costs even if they lose. So there are …

ANDREW MARR:
For newspapers who really fear this is the beginning, the thin end of the wedge of politicians telling them what they think of their reporters - as somebody has told the BBC this morning, for instance, one of our reporters - who think it’s the beginning of huge numbers of frivolous complaints and it’s a nightmare, simply the possibility of having to pay costs doesn’t sound too bad a penalty to pay. I think if I was one of them, I’d say I’m going to stay out, thank you very much.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well the most important reason not to stay out is because everybody’s recognised that there needs to be a proper press complaints system for address for individuals if the code breach … if the press breach their own code of ethics. So it’s simply saying you’ve got your professional standards. That’s right that you should have those. But what happens if there’s a breach? You cannot have you sitting in judgement on yourself. And this would create a system which is independent not only of politicians but also for the newspaper editors …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Alright. I …

HARRIET HARMAN:
(over) So I hope you know even at this late stage, they will think again about their resistance on this. We’re not running this system and we’re simply saying it should be an independent system but it’s got to work.

ANDREW MARR:
Harriet Harman, you don’t sound like you’re sitting there with a big stick. You don’t have a punishment for me if I’m Sunday Times or the The Sun or The Spectator. Actually I’m just going to ignore you. I’m sorry to say that, but it’s …

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

*(over)* Well you know at this point we’re taking the charter, as Danny Alexander said.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Yeah.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

We’re taking the charter to the Privy Council this week, so it’s not for me to be standing here with a stick. The fact of the matter is there are disincentives in the system, penalties if you like for people who don’t join a regulator under the new system. But I hope that won’t be the case because I hope they will set up a regulator.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Two other questions very quickly, if I may. The BBC coming under the cosh again this morning. Are you surprised, are you dismayed by the tone of what Grant Shapps, the Conservative Party Chairman, has been saying?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**

Well I think it’s absolutely wrong. I mean he’s the Chair of the Conservative Party. I note this has not come from the Secretary of State for Culture, Maria Miller, and I’m sure she wouldn’t be doing that. What he’s doing is he’s complaining about the BBC, using the fact that we’re heading into charter review and licence fee review, in order to put pressure on the BBC because the Conservatives are trying to somehow blame the BBC for the fact that they’re having to report that the Government is actually not succeeding in so many ways.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Well it’s worked. I am completely intimidated, I’d like to say. And on which note, what about HS2 because very interesting - Danny Alexander was saying there is a cap of 42 billion; we’re going to stick to that cap. Ed Balls is saying if it rises above 50
billion, we’re out. Does that mean that as things stand, you are still in for HS2 and you will support it as a party?

HARRIET HARMAN:
We absolutely support better North-South lines, we’re in favour of rail infrastructure for commuters and also for long distance travellers and freight, but not at any cost.

ANDREW MARR:
Right.

HARRIET HARMAN:
And what Ed Balls is saying is we have to keep a strong eye on the costs as well as on the benefits and it’s no good the Government simply complaining about people who are raising these issues; they should be addressing these issues, controlling costs and being properly analytical about the benefits that are available.

ANDREW MARR:
It’s just that comparing it to the millennium dome seems a bit like the kiss of death.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well actually I mean he was asked about the millennium dome. He didn’t volunteer.

ANDREW MARR:
Right.

HARRIET HARMAN:
Ed Balls was asked about the millennium dome. I mean we … (Marr tries to interject)
You know the Government have got to be responsible about this.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) If the costs don’t rise beyond where they are at the moment, Labour will still support this?

HARRIET HARMAN:
Well basically there’s a question of costs and the benefits …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Right.

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
… and you have to look at both of them.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Ah, so not necessarily?

**HARRIET HARMAN:**
This is the responsibility that the Government have for spending public money. They’ve got to be absolutely sure - it’s already a large amount of money - is the benefits justifying it, is it the right project? And we’ve got to all the way along be encouraging the Government instead of just cheerleading for this and blaming people who raise issues, saying this is a massive amount of public money. It’s got to be well spent.

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) It better be well spent. Alright. Harriet Harman, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**