



Press Release

Matthew Parris leads Lloyd's Leveson debate

Markel and MLA host media seminar at Lloyd's with guest speaker Matthew Parris

Markel International, London, 12 November. Markel international, the specialist insurer with a worldwide professional liability business, joined forces with the Media Lawyers Association (MLA) on 6 November to host a debate at Lloyd's on media regulation and the Leveson Inquiry.

Entitled 'The stealthy victory of propriety over truth', the debate was led by Matthew Parris, the distinguished broadcaster, journalist and former Conservative MP. Attending the debate in the Old Library at Lloyd's were more than 130 media and legal professionals, including newspaper editors, barristers and high court judges.

Parris, known for defending Rupert Murdoch, opened the debate by raising the question of whether the end justified the means, and highlighted the difficulty of defining a precise boundary between public interest and unwarranted media intrusion. He cited historic examples of the media's vigorous pursuit of truth or, depending on your viewpoint, "salacious" mischief-making, including the exposure of Charles Stewart Parnell's adulterous affair in the 19th century, the fall of Lord Lambton in the 1970s, and the scandals surrounding Harvey Proctor in the 1980s and David Mellor in the 1990s.

Addressing the issue of phone hacking, Matthew commented on which party might have a greater claim to injury if messages were retrieved by the press, observing that perhaps the sender of a hacked message should feel more violated than the receiver. He examined the ideal of absolute truth and whether it had primacy in the contentious middle ground between ethics and public interest. Moreover, he questioned how we should decide what is fit for public consumption, asking who has the right, and the power to discriminate, on our behalf?

Sharing the stage with Matthew was a panel that expressed a wide spectrum of opinion. Brian Cathcart, founder of the pressure group Hacked Off, argued in favour of press controls and greater regulation, welcoming the transparency promised by the Leveson Inquiry, and calling for journalism that is answerable to the public. In contrast, David Price, QC, one of the UK's leading media lawyers, defended the pursuit of truth and the need for a free and unfettered press. The debate was chaired by Gillian Phillips, director of editorial legal services at Guardian News & Media Limited

Commenting on the evening, Julian Brown, who leads Markel's media liability team, said: "We were delighted to attract such an eminent panel and to discuss a topic that is generating huge interest and intense feelings in the run-up to the Leveson Report, due at the end of this month. As media insurers, we are naturally very interested in the recommendations that may follow and the implications for media liability."

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Notes to editors

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