

PRESS FREEDOM IS IMPERILLED !
GOD HELP US, ALL !

No! No! No!

Under no conditions should there be any kind of gag on a Free Press.

Any Press gag, no matter how innocuous it may appear on the surface, has the ability to explode, and to become that which, surely, could come to negate the role of the Press in a free society: The free dissemination of information.

And a free Press acts as a watchdog of the government, for the people.

Any gag of the Press within a free society could result in a government, refusing a lawful request from the media for information on the grounds that it violates some code or law; and, such a request is not in the interests of society.

It is impossible for a female to be a little pregnant: She either is with child; or, she has not conceived.

Mr Li Ka Shing, Chairman of Cheung Kong (Holdings) Ltd, may be one of the richest men in the world, but that does not make him the most intelligent man in the world.

Nor does it make him sufficiently knowledgeable as to how a government should be run.

Mr Li Ka Shing, just last Thursday, is reported to have stated: *'There are lots of victims (of outrageous liberties, taken by the HKSAR Press – assumed) who do not have the time nor the money to take legal action against organised media groups. The establishment of a (Government) media watchdog will allow fairness to be maintained in the community ...'*

Mr Li appears to be advocating that the Government of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the media act in unison with the view of establishing a Press Council for the protection of privacy.

One prays that the media will reject such a suggestion, since the Free Press, the loyal opposition to the Government, has a duty to watch the Government, and its actions, and to report any excesses.

In order to maintain an unbiased stance, with regard to the Government and its actions, it cannot cooperate with the Government in order to assist it to establish gags to be applied to the Press.

If that should be the case, then, the Press is no longer a Free Press; and, it fails in its mandate to the people.

'Black is black and white is white. Now, the places of what is black and what is white are often reversed, inflicting damage on good people,' Mr Li Ka Shing is quoted as having stated last Thursday.

One may be inclined to ask the reason that Mr Li Ka Shing is, openly, advocating the establishment of a Government Press Council.

Also, for what reason is Mr Li Ka Shing so vocal about issues which, clearly, are outside his normal bailiwick?

Mr Li Ka Shing is a businessman, and a very successful one, at that, but it is very interesting to note that he is one of the very few HKSAR businessmen, who likes to speak up on matters, which, clearly, are within the purview of the HKSAR Government.

However, Mr Li Ka Shing appeared to have found his voice only after July 1, 1997.

Having said that, however, Mr Li Ka Shing is, naturally, entitled to his opinion.

But one hopes that Mr Li Ka Shing's opinion does not colour the determination of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR, Mr Tung Chee Hwa, or, for that matter, any other member of the HKSAR Government.

Mr Li Ka Shing would have the world believe that *'Nowadays, everything has to be reasonable'* and that *'unreasonable things cannot stand.'*

This begs the questions:

1. What is to be considered *reasonable*, and what is to be considered *unreasonable*?
2. Who or what committee will consider what is to be considered *reasonable*, and what is to be considered *unreasonable*?
3. Will the HKSAR Government's established definitions for *'reasonableness'* be subject to change, depending on the circumstances; or, will there be a hard-and-fast definition, which will stand forever?

Consider: Would it be reasonable to report that a certain HKSAR mogul was getting married to a movie star?

Would that be reasonable? Would that be an invasion of privacy?

What about a situation whereby the son of an HKSAR mogul was involved in a motor-car accident, which resulted in the unfortunate death of the son's girlfriend? Should that matter be reported, or would that be an invasion of privacy?

What about a situation whereby a mogul was seen to have been an insider trader, even obliquely, and he was charged with this infraction of the rules by the Insider Trading Tribunal?

Should that be reported? Would that be a reasonable matter to report? Or would that be an invasion of privacy?

Should a mogul's actions be treated, by the Press, differently from any other member of the public? Or, should a mogul be afforded special treatment by the Press?

Should justice be done and seen to be done? Or is that not reasonable?

According to a former Executive Councillor, Mr S. Y. Chung: *'Everything in the world has to be monitored.'*

'Freedom does not mean you can spit in public. Things you do should not affect others.'

If this quote has not been taken out of context, it is a remarkable statement for this gentleman to make; and, it smacks of a leaning toward an autocratic government.

The best controller of the Press is the people, themselves.

For, if the Press is seen to be irresponsible and inaccurate, it will, eventually, be shunned by those on whom the Press relies: Its readers.

An irresponsible Press will destroy itself.

The Government need not regulate an irresponsible Press because its revenues will dry up as fewer and fewer people come to rely on it as a *'reasonable'* and reliable source of information.

Moguls and governments need not fear the Press in a free society, but reasonable people should fear official governmental restraints, imposed on the Press, as well as a lack of objective and impartial

Perhaps, for this entreaty on maintaining Press freedom for the HKSAR, the immortal William Shakespeare should speak, again, as he did in his famous play, Hamlet, for nobody better could pen words than he, when he wrote this play, 398 years ago:

*' To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them. To die -to sleep,
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life,
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.*

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