Twitter Thread by Andrew Neil

Andrew Neil
@afneil

Spectator thread: Among the Scottish parliament's many crucial roles, there is none more important than its ability to scrutinise government and hold it to account. The same is true of a free press. Both are at their best when they hold power to account on behalf of the public.

But neither can do this essential duty when crucial documents are withheld during important inquiries. The Holyrood inquiry into the Scottish Gov's handling of the Alex Salmond affair decided last week that it would not publish crucial submissions, including Mr Salmond's ....

... apparently because it would contravene reporting restrictions rightly introduced to protect the identity of complainants. We have published a duly redacted version of Alex Salmond's account on our website.

We felt that an overly-cautious interpretation of the court order by the committee was frustrating the due process of parliamentary inquiry — and the freedom of the press to publish matters of public interest and importance.

We were aware that the court never intended to obstruct parliamentary or public scrutiny; but because of how the committee had interpreted the issue, we today sought clarification from the High Court in Edinburgh.

We are pleased Lady Dorrian has, at our request, added further clarity to her order. This is what we hoped for: parliament + press cannot do their job properly without being able to refer to crucial documents relating to the integrity of the First Minister and her administration

We take no sides in the arguments around the Salmond case and firmly believe that anonymity for complainants in cases of sexual harassment — or worse — is vital. But in a democracy, transparency matters.

So all relevant papers should be able to be read and judged by parliamentarians and the public — and freely published by the media.
When the Scottish parliament building opened in 2004, Liz Lochhead read aloud to MSPs a poem Edwin Morgan. The verse is on display to this day:

“A nest of fearties is what they do not want
A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want.
A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want.
And perhaps above all the droopy mantra of ‘it wizny me’ is what they do not want.”

In recent weeks the Inquiry has been in danger of descending into farce, with fearties and forelock-tuggers to the fore. We hope Lady Dorrian’s ruling will allow sense to prevail in Holyrood. The public want and deserve transparency.

They expect the Scottish parliament to apply proper scrutiny. They also expect the media to do its job of holding power to account. We now hope and expect that the committee can release all relevant papers, so due process can recommence.