

Watch for Met helplines

NUJ FREELANCE Organiser John Toner says of the student protests and kettling in Whitehall, "A number of photographers have been in touch to commend the police treatment of media workers at the 24 November demonstration. Officers checked Press Cards and afforded access to holders of current cards. The NUJ National Executive Council has agreed we should write to the police to thank them and express our hope that such good relations will continue."

The Metropolitan Police have re-

cently been passing on to the Freelance Office their helpline numbers for journalists encountering any difficulties with police officers while covering particular demonstrations in London, such as the 30 November Trafalgar Square "Day X2" student protests.

With continuing anti-cuts protests – and police operations in response to them – being planned often at very short notice, watch the online *Freelance* for Metropolitan Police helpline numbers for working journalists covering particular pro-

tests. These may go up as little as 24 hours in advance of the event, so keep watching this space.

The *Freelance* has heard of a few cases of journalists with UK Press Cards covering the November 24 protests being told by police officers that they had "instructions" not to let them out of the kettle.

As ever, please forward any intelligence on the police being particularly helpful or obstructive towards you in the course of your work, via the policing report form www.londonfreelance.org/policing

Watch for Blackburn strikes

Staff at Newsquest's Blackburn centre have voted for industrial action over a two-year pay freeze. Watch www.nuj.org.uk for possible strike dates on which freelances might find themselves unavailable for work with *Asian Image*, *Blackburn Citizen*, *Burnley Citizen*, *Chorley Citizen* or the *Lancashire Telegraph*.

Who's afraid of photographers?

A MEETING at the House of Commons, initiated by Don Foster MP (pictured) and organised by the NUJ's Freelance Office, attracted more than 70 photographers and MPs to ask the question: who's afraid of photographers?

Foster noted that Section 44 of the Terrorism Act is suspended, but "we need to make absolutely certain that it is actually repealed."

Photographer David Hoffman observed: "We are at a crossroads. This Government has made promises and it's that baton, not the one

hanging from the PC's belt, that we need to take up now."

The meeting also heard from Professor Chris Frost on ethics; solicitor Anna Mazzola of Hickman & Rose on privacy; and solicitor Chez Cotton of Bindmans on the laws deployed against photographers.

The NUJ's Freelance Industrial Council is now discussing an initiative to support public-interest photography in public spaces – especially those which are privatised, such as malls and Canary Wharf.

John Toner



Video of the "Who's afraid of photographers?" event is available at www.londonfreelance.org/fi/1012fear.html

Photo © Jason Parkinson

Report urges Met to facilitate fair reporting

A REPORT on policing protests in the wake of the G20 demos in London in April 2009 has been welcomed by the NUJ. *Responding to G20* by the Metropolitan Police Authority includes consultation with protestors and with media workers – the NUJ assisted in organising that. NUJ Freelance Organiser John Toner said "we are pleased to see that our recommendations have been acknowledged and endorsed."

The Civil Liberties Panel of the MPA, which oversees policing in London for the Greater London Authority, recommends that the Metropolitan Police must "review its

approach to news management to facilitate transparent and fair reporting by the media and 'citizen journalists'." On the subject of kettling protests, it recommends: "If containment is used, officers should be required to record when they prevent journalists from crossing containment cordons and the reasons for doing so". It wants "a more clearly auditable trail" kept by police of such incidents.

The report notes "Members often report that they encounter police officers who have neither seen nor heard of the Press Card," adding that "there is a training need to

ensure that all officers are aware of its implications". Responding to comments by police officers during protests that "the cards might be forgeries", the Civil Liberties panel did some research and concluded that "the cards incorporate sophisticated technology to ensure they could not be forged" as well as having unique PINs.

John Toner said, "We also hope that this is not a report that will be forgotten about", and looked to the Panel to monitor implementation and review progress on the areas highlighted in the report. The report is at www.mpa.gov.uk/clp/2009

Brighton Argus petition

NUJ members at the *Brighton Argus* went on strike on 18 and 19 November over plans to move its sub-editing operation to Southampton. The strikers received messages of support from Brighton MPs and local councillors. Sign up to "keep the *Brighton Argus* local" at, oddly enough, www.petition.co.uk/keep-the-brighton-argus-local

The Sky's limit

NOW WITH added Bishop, the campaign to at least get an investigation of whether it's a good idea for the Murdoch family to own Sky News outright is taking off. The UK Office of Fair Trading declined, but the EU's Competition Directorate took up the baton and announced a probe three days after its deadline.

And communications regulator OFCOM is also to investigate the effect on UK media pluralism. This followed 60,000 messages to OFCOM through petition tool www.38degrees.org.uk

The Bishop of Manchester, Nigel McCulloch, earlier told OFCOM: "There would always be the potential for the exercise of subtle editorial influence, not least in the process of selecting which news items are to be covered and which left out." This has been highlighted by controversy in the US over the fact that the Murdoch-owned Fox News has contracted five leading far-right-wing prospects for the Republican candidature in the 2012 US Presidential election – and is refusing interviews to other news out-

lets. *New York Times*, columnist Paul Krugman warned "Tea Party" activists: "This is not the movie you think it is. You probably imagine that you're starring in *The Birth of a Nation*, but you're actually just extras in a remake of *Citizen Kane*."

And Fox News interviewed an opponent of Proposition 24 on the California ballot in November, which if passed would have ended corporate tax breaks, while forgetting to mention that his campaign was funded by – you guessed? – the Murdoch empire.

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