

## LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH MEETINGS

## Defamation, regulation, celebration

IF IT'S October it must be libel. Reform of defamation (libel and slander) law will be examined in the LFB meeting on **Monday 10 October**. There's currently a libel reform Bill before Parliament.

Speakers for the October meeting are libel lawyer Robert Dougans and freelance journalist and *Index on Censorship* news editor Pdraig Reidy. Robert was lead lawyer on the right side in *British Chiropractic Association v Simon Singh*, which overturned libel damages the BCA had sought after a critical piece by Singh in the *Guardian*. *Index on Censorship* has been running a "Free speech is not for sale" campaign for reform of English libel law.

Regulating the press is the subject of the LFB meeting on **Monday 14 November**. The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) is on its way out, unmourned. Like it or not, there's go-

ing to be some kind of replacement. What should that be? Lord Justice Leveson's inquiry opened in September, slated to run for a year. This is going to be a major issue for all the media for that time. (See [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1105dm.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1105dm.html) on the NUJ Delegate Meeting 2011 commitment to campaign for the PCC's abolition.)

Professor Natalie Fenton, co-director of the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths, University of London, is confirmed as our speaker. Watch this space (at [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings)) for more.

The LFB gathering on **Monday 12 December** will almost certainly take the form of an end-of-year festive party with some free food and drink. The venue is provisionally the NUJ's HQ at Headland House in Gray's Inn Road, 308-312 Gray's Inn

Rd, London WC1X 8DP. Watch the website for confirmation of details.

This issue went to press on 3 October. The deadline for the next print issue is **18 November**

LFB meetings (except, probably, in December) are 7pm to 9pm at Friends' House, Euston Road, which is accessible to people who use wheelchairs. If you need the Branch to pay for care for a child or dependent so you can attend a meeting, call a Branch officer. For updates on meetings see the Branch calendar web page [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb/meetings)

Volunteer minute-takers are needed for the LFB meetings throughout 2011 and beyond. For details of the NUJ London Photographers' Branch meetings, see <http://londonphotographers.org>

## REVIEW

## Alienated lances unite!

PERHAPS, when you receive one of those contracts through which a publisher graciously offers to relieve you of all rights in your work in media yet to be discovered and universes yet to be invented, your first thought is rarely "what would John Locke have made of this?"

It may not be immediately apparent, either, that your outrage probably implies a "natural law" approach to ownership rights, likely owing something in its implicit definition to the 17th-century philosopher Locke. It may be clearer, at least now it's put this way, that the publishers you confront are applying a utilitarian neo-classical model to minimise

transaction costs... It certainly feels as though something that is naturally yours is being taken away from you. But what is a "natural right"?

Giuseppina D'Agostino is familiar, as Director of the Osgoode Hall Law School at York University in Canada, with both the US/UK copyright regime, in which copyright is (merely) a property right, and the natural-rights-based Authors' Rights law that broadly applies in neighbouring Quebec, founded (in theory) on the inalienable right to maintain a connection with your work.

She has written a most unusual beast: a law textbook examining, in detail, how the rights of freelance

journalists could and should be protected. It very thoroughly reviews the case-law, so if you ever have to go to court you should thrust this into your lawyer's hand early on.

And part of the answer to the opening question is: Locke would have been deeply unimpressed with publishers demanding "assignment" of rights, because then you have to ask their permission to share your own work with anyone, ever again.

We freelancers should not be beguiled, she says, by the presence of the letters "free" in our non-job description.

In economic terms we are more exploited than factory workers, who were eventually allowed to bargain collectively and still are, up to a point. Alienated from our labour, that's us.

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• *Copyright, contracts, creators* by Giuseppina D'Agostino (Edward Elgar: ISBN 1847201067) £79.95

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**WANT TO TRY YOUR HAND** at writing fiction? The Complete Creative Writing Course at the Groucho Club offers courses in creative writing and also in screenwriting and writing for children. Courses start in October. Cost: £295-£315 including VAT for six three-hour sessions. We also offer intermediate and advanced level courses at other venues. For full details go to [www.writing-courses.org.uk](http://www.writing-courses.org.uk) or ring Maggie on 0207 503 6285.

FREELANCE

Branch contacts: [www.londonfreelance.org/lfb](http://www.londonfreelance.org/lfb)  
Online Freelance contents: [www.londonfreelance.org/fl](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl)

## New members

There's a meeting for new and recently-joined members of NUJ London Freelance Branch on **Thursday 27 October**. It's a chance to meet other people new to the Branch, and there will also be some more experienced working journalist Branch members on hand with advice and tips. The meeting's from 6pm at the Camera Café, Museum Street, London WC1.

## Election re-run

New ballot papers for the election of an NUJ Deputy General Secretary are being sent out after an error was found in the list of members sent to the Electoral Reform Society. Your new ballot paper will be a different colour to the old one. Now's the time to tell [membership@nuj.org.uk](mailto:membership@nuj.org.uk) about any change of address.

## CONTACTS

## Freelance office

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