Jun/Jul 2012

FREELANCE

Reporting's future

TESTIFYING to the May London Freelance Branch meeting was NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet, key witness at the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice, and ethics of the press. The union gained Core Participant status, which means sight of inquiry documents before they're placed in the public domain and the right to apply to cross-examine witnesses. Michelle told how the inquiry team resisted the NUJ being a Core Participant, believing that individual journalists would provide the necessary testimony on the experience of working in the newsroom. But it soon became clear that "while there was no shortage of proprietors to talk to, actually getting working journalists to talk in the courtroom" was much harder. Then News Corp, Associated Newspapers and the Met tried to block the NUJ from presenting testimony for journalists who wanted anonymity. News Corp's submission dismissed the anonymous witnesses as "malcontents" or "just casuals". Despite these efforts, Michelle presented testimony gathered from a dozen journalists on "the almost endemic scale of bullying in some newsrooms."

This, very different to testimony from newspaper owners, has, Michelle feels, been an "an eye opener" to Leveson and his counsel Robert Jay QC, alongside the "freak show" of Desmond, Northern Shell and "the characters who sit at the top of these organisations."

Michelle Stanistreet, at left, with Chair Dave Rotchelle and Sarah Kavanagh
Photo © **Mike Holderness**

Leveson has been for the NUJ "a very public opportunity – the best opportunity for a generation – to raise awareness of what life is like in… some workplaces."

The NUJ has been campaigning for conscience clauses written in to every contract and collective agreement. Back in 2003, a Home Affairs Select Committee hearing recommended such a clause, but the Society of Editors refused to act on it.

Now proprietors in front of Leveson – Murdoch and Sly Bailey, then of Trinity Mirror, for example – have endorsed the concept of a conscience clause. The *Freelance* observes, though, that such a clause would be rather more useful in offices where the NUJ is recognised.

Leveson's "Module 4", on the future and press regulation, will be the big one for the union The NUJ's Delegate Meeting three years ago decided that the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) was beyond reform and called for its abolition. Now the PCC is winding up. The Union's "briefish document on our policy and future model" to succeed the PCC was submitted to Leveson in April. It advocated "something more akin" to the successful Press Council in Ireland, on which journalists are well represented.

Michelle notes that some UK "employers who refuse to talk to us" will nonetheless send delegates to Ireland to "talk in a civilised way with the NUJ people on the Council."

LFB's Tim Gopsill described the phone-hacking scandal and "Leveson" as a "collective wake-up call" about journalistic ethics, which the NUJ could use as a recruitment tool. Michelle says "so many students are doing essays on ethics – it's already in their minds that the Union stands for these things." Sarah Kavanagh reports the NUJ's "Leveson team" getting three or four quote requests a week from such students.

The NUJ's counsel will want to question David Cameron and George Osborne in the coming weeks. The inquiry is likely to go on until just before the Olympics. There may still time to email Michelle suggestions for questions – in confidence – to **leveson@nuj.org.uk**

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For fair contracts, send us the unfair ones

THE EUROPEAN Federation of Journalists has launched a continent-wide campaign for fair contracts for journalists. The first step here in the UK is to gather information on contracts. Especially interesting will be details of contracts being imposed without negotiation. So we're asking for your help, as part of our annual freelance market monitor survey.

At the heart of UK law is the idea of "primacy of contract". The law should do nothing, say lawmakers – especially conservatives – to stop you sitting down across a table from Rupert Murdoch to negotiate as competitive equals whatever deal you both like. One economist showed the flaw in this fantasy by declaring that any contract must be "fair" unless one party held a literal gun to the head of the other.

So: do you have photos of said gun, smoking? Or has any editor carelessly put in writing that if you don't sign the attached contract you'll never darken their door again? Or hinted, in writing? We need to hear from you. We need examples of the most egregious contracts you have been presented with, even if there isn't evidence of them being imposed.

If you won't in fact be darkening their door, you may as well share the exchange: but rest assured that we will treat all communications about contracts in strict confidence until or unless we have your specific authorisation otherwise.

So, in particular, we would like you to tell us:

- Can you send examples of contracts you have been offered by clients – whether good or bad, whether you accepted or declined?
- Can you send examples of messages pressuring you to sign "standard" contracts? For example, hints or direct statements from commissioners that you won't get work

See UNFAIR CONTRACTS on p 2

LFB meetings

9 July

Investigative journalism: the state of play

August

No meeting

See back page & www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB