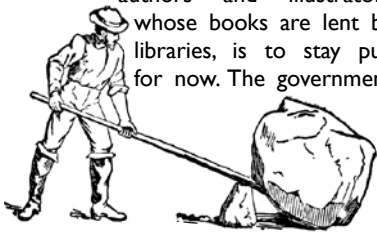


Public lending is all right

THE PUBLIC Lending Right Office, which distributes money to authors and illustrators whose books are lent by libraries, is to stay put, for now. The government



A fulcrum, from *School Physics* by Elroy M. Avery (New York: 1895)

had insisted that it would be thrown onto the “bonfire of the quangos”. Having had 1015 responses to its consultation paper, it has decided that the existing lean, mean funding machine will stay put in Stockton-on-Tees under boss Jim Parker, but will reprint its headed paper to say it is a division of the British Library.

The British Library replied to the widespread suspicion that it has an interest in weakening copyright and – though it does not lend books

itself – reducing payments to creators, saying that it “is committed to a robust and balanced copyright regime that respects the interests of rights holders, creators and users alike [and] operates at the fulcrum of the copyright balance.”

One point in the government statement reeks of an “oops!” Jim Parker co-ordinates the International PLR network: “the future of the network will be an area for further consideration...”

Sign up for media pluralism

The European Initiative for Media Pluralism – www.mediainitiative.eu – has launched a Citizens’ Initiative petition calling for a European Directive which would make member states introduce: effective legislation to avoid concentration of ownership in the media and advertisement sectors; guaranteed independence of supervisory bodies from political power; a definition of conflict of interests to avoid media moguls occupying high political office; and clearer European monitoring systems to check up regularly the health and independence of the media in member states. The NUJ supports the Initiative through its membership of the International Federation of Journalists.

Treat data like any other source

GOOD DATA journalism is “not really about maths,” says *Guardian* Datablog editor Simon Rogers: it’s about “treating data as another journalistic source”. *Financial Times* economics editor Chris Giles believes that “data helps you to get to the truth,” but in dealing with data there are “exactly the same issues as dealing with sources.”

Chris and Simon were speaking at the London Freelance Branch March meeting, on data journalism. Simon works “close to the news desk” and his Datablog team has since “gone from being an eccentric part of the newspaper, to part of the editorial process.” It now produces “two or three pieces a day hooked to the news agenda”.

Recently Datablog has covered antibiotics use in the UK compared to other countries; and a detailed look at people sentenced in connection with the 2011 riots. Using a Ministry of Justice “data deluge” eventually released to the *Guardian*, Simon’s team showed 2011 riot defendants were disproportion-

ately “from poor parts of country... treated more harshly” than usual by the courts, and included “an unusual number of minors.”

Data journalism has taken off, says Simon, because “barriers to entry are very low: there are lots of free tools out there... you don’t have to be techie to use them.”

Chris Giles came from statistics and economics into journalism – “telling the story I actually found harder than doing the numbers.” He spotted a £12 billion hole in the government’s finances after uncovering flaws in the equation behind the “model” the Office for Budget Responsibility uses for forecasting. Chris “replicated” the OBS model and “didn’t quite get their results,” then “went to them privately; they were helpful.” Data is now, says Chris, “quite cool – a while ago it was lonely... like being a librarian.” Data journalists “don’t need a degree in stats,” more important is an ability to find “things that other people want to know,” and to produce “great storytelling out of the data.” Treat data

journalism and its new tools “as carefully as ever,” warns Chris, giving as example a finding that Twitter comments on Natwest’s recent cash machine failure were generally positive: the software couldn’t handle the sarcasm in those comments.



Can freelances get in on the data action? Chris says the *FT*’s responses to a freelance data journalism pitch “wouldn’t be different from any other story: we’d want to check it.”

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Data journalists Chris Giles (left) and Simon Rogers (right) with LFB Chair Dave Rotchelle (centre).

Photo © Richard Lipman, www.lipmanfilms.com

It’s good to talk – about rates, contracts and Haymarket

FREELANCE journalists need to start sharing their experiences and linking up with each other, if they are going to resist attacks on pay and conditions, freelance organiser John Toner told a freelance activists’ summit meeting on 16 March. More than 20 members met at Headland House to hear about successful campaigns to improve freelance conditions and discuss tactics.

Ian Cranna described how Haymarket has recently changed the ways that it engages “casuals”, paying them holiday and sickness pay, but insisting on taxing them at source, and cutting day rates from £150 to £120. A member reported that this followed another magazine publisher being hit hard by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for paying people who were really staff as if freelance.

Some had been told that they

would have to accept the new rate even if they were sub-editing at home. At least one person had, we were informed telepathically, managed to negotiate the day rate back up a bit, on condition of not telling.

Assistant Organiser Pamela Morton described an increasing number of publishers trying to require contributors to sign “indemnity” agreements, which aim to shift all legal risk, including the cost of defending defamation cases or copyright disputes, onto freelances. She also described instances of members agreeing amendments such as promising to use all reasonable professional efforts to ensure that their copy posed no legal risk, or limiting the amount of the indemnity to the amount paid.

Mike Holderness, chair of the Creators’ Rights Alliance, outlined recent developments in the NUJ’s

ongoing campaign to defend freelance journalists’ rights to their work – see page 1. NUJ vice president (job share) Adam Christie told the meeting about the range of resources that the union made available, including the *Freelance Fact Pack* and the Freelance Directory. He urged members to share information on what they’re being paid through www.londonfreelance.org/rates

Closing the meeting, General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet promised freelances that we could count on her support, and that of the rest of the NUJ, when they came together to campaign for improved pay and conditions.

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• The email network for Haymarket freelances has been re-launched: to sign up visit www.londonfreelance.org/HayBazaar

Been stopped under Terrorism Act Schedule 7?

THE NUJ is seeking information from members who have been stopped and questioned under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Have you been asked questions about your research, or had your phone or laptop examined? Schedule 7 seems to override automatic rights to a lawyer under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. It could be that the questions you were asked did not relate to terrorism in any way. If you have had similar experiences, please email campaigns@nuj.org.uk – all information will be treated confidentially. More at www.londonfreelance.org/fi/1303terr.html