

LFB hits record

London Freelance Branch has hit a record. The latest figures show us having 4273 members. We've long been the largest branch in probably the largest union of journalists in the world, and we're growing.

Stop Murdoch!

RUPERT Murdoch, who currently owns 39 per cent of broadcaster Sky, is preparing a bid to buy the remainder of the company. His attempt to do so five years ago collapsed with the scandal over the *News of the World* hacking phones.

The May London Freelance Branch meeting voted to donate £400 to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (www.cpb.org.uk). This has been active in ensuring the bid was referred to

mediaregulator Ofcom and is part of the campaign to stop the renewed Murdoch bid going ahead. More lobbying work is needed.

Ofcom is preparing a report on whether Murdoch is a "fit and proper person" to hold a broadcasting licence. The Competition and Markets Authority will prepare a report on jurisdictional issues. We have more time to campaign: the timetable's been put back by the election (see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1705murd.html for more).

Tim Gopsill, LFB Secretary and editor of the CPBF magazine *Free Press*, explained that Murdoch's Sky bid was being scrutinised by a "regulatory process biased towards approval". The current bid is by Murdoch's 21st Century Fox group, which owns Fox News. Tim warned that "when Murdoch gets 100 per cent of Sky he will turn it into Fox News."

Tim reported that Ofcom had recently met with Fox News employee Wendy Walsh and her lawyer, who were in London to raise issues of "governance" around Fox News ahead of the bid.

Fox and its senior anchor Bill O'Reilly have between then paid out well over \$13 million in settlements

over sexual harassment allegations, much of it in severance packages to departing male staff members accused of harassment.

It was once thought to be impossible to turn Sky into Fox News, given the UK's "balanced, regulated broadcasting ecology" and the Ofcom Broadcasting Code. But if it becomes a wholly-owned Murdoch company, with James Murdoch as chair... both Murdochs said they hate UK regulation, and that "The only reliable, durable, and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit," as Rupert told the 2009 Edinburgh International Television Festival.

There is a real risk of "Foxification" of Sky, which now provides almost all news for local commercial radio. Tim predicted that what we are likely to see on a wholly-Murdoch-owned Sky is wall-to-wall commentary, "right-wing talk shows, presented by controversial and forceful hosts who broadcast right-wing propaganda, non-stop."

He noted that all the key examples of "fake news" that were instrumental in Trump's election were either started or spread by Fox News. Watch this space.

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Rupert Murdoch features among temporary Shoreditch-style street art on Pitfield Street, London, last autumn

Street artist unknown. Photo: © Matt Salusbury

More online

You will find more at www.londonfreelance.org/fl including:

- The collection of Tim Dawson's President's Platform columns at www.londonfreelance.org/president

- In particular, the President's report from "Jailed colleagues pre-occupy Turkey's journalists": www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1705prez.html

- A report of Vaughan Smith's talk to the May meeting: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1706vaug.html

- A meeting in Brussels on EU proposals for protecting whistleblowers: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1706whis.html

- Longer versions of other stories appearing here: www.londonfreelance.org/fl

- An updated Frequently Asked Questions: www.londonfreelance.org/FAQ

Brexit: ignore Home Office advice not to seek advice

NOW that Article 50 has been triggered, what should our many colleagues from other EU (or EEA) countries expect?

The UK government's new Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2016 in theory give it the power to remove EU nationals in certain circumstances. Any such removals – particularly mass removals – would be practically near impossible. Theresa May has since admitted that freedom of movement is likely to continue "in some form" for a while post-Brexit.

The Home Office has issued advice that EU nationals "do not need to do anything as a result of Article 50 being triggered." However, this is apparently not to be trusted, and appears to be a ploy to avoid having to deal with the considerable paperwork of tens of thousands of

EU nationals applying for Permanent Residence (PR). Immigration lawyers advise that "other EU" nationals disregard Home Office advice and take any steps that they can to ensure they can't possibly be booted out come spring 2019. These include, if you're not an employee, registering as a job seeker, registering as self-employed and getting a Unique Tax Reference number from HMRC if you haven't already, and so on. Seek legal advice, say lawyers.

The European Council's recent draft negotiating guidelines have made it clear the rights of EU nationals to remain in the UK, as well as the status of UK nationals in what's left of the EU, are a "top priority" in negotiations, "crucial" to the deal.

The EU is demanding that EU nationals who've been in the UK for five years must have the right to

reside here for life, even if they are economically inactive (carers, for example). This appears to include any of their future partners joining them, for life. Negotiations between the EU and the UK are currently not going terribly well.

The Council's draft guidelines also demand a "simple and smooth application procedure" for EU citizens to get Permanent Residence, a pointed reference to the current 82-page application form, described by one MEP as "a bureaucratic wall": see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1706perm.html for more on residence.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament, which has a final veto over the EU-UK exit deal, indicates that one issue over which it plans to exercise its veto is the rights of EU nationals in the UK. Watch this space.

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the basis for a new deal for Britain's independent workers. If you are a freelance feeling the squeeze, let the candidates know.

7 Even if you find aspects of the BBC's coverage irksome, a government of any stripe should recognise the vital role of the BBC and guarantee its funding.

8 Rupert Murdoch's grab for total control of Sky television (see above) might falter all by itself, but that is no reason for complacency.

The union works with an all-party group of MPs who aid our campaigns, most recently chaired by Helen Goodman, seeking re-election as Labour member for Bishop Auckland. She concurs that there is always value in seeking out those wishing to

represent you! "individual cases influence the way MPs vote and the policies we adopt more often than you might think."

Whoever forms the next government, if enough NUJ members play the role of active citizens, our working lives and journalism will benefit.

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- There's more at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1705prez2.html