

lances", in particular at Thompson Reuters, where the company "required" its freelance subs to operate as limited companies. NUJ vice-president Sian Jones addresses Trades Union Congress on a composite motion calling for improved workers' rights for freelances, including the NUJ's vital observation that some of us *want* to be freelance.

The end of tabloid might?

Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn addressed Congress – and Tim interviewed him ahead of his

earlier address to the NUJ's National Executive Council (NEC). Jeremy's first job was as a reporter on a local newspaper: he is a member of the NUJ, supports "journalists being able to be employed to work independently and report what they see," and tends to agree that the tabloid editors are a busted flush.

Support workers in trauma

London Freelance Branch co-chair Pennie Quinton addressed Congress in support of a composite motion calling for funding for mental

health support for workers who suffer trauma due to their work. As Pennie said, the NUJ is concerned by the high incidence in newsroom journalists of secondary post-traumatic stress disorder due to their routine exposure to raw footage from war zones, terrorism and natural disasters. "Journalists working on the



Trades Union Congress General Secretary Frances O'Grady
Photo © **Tim Dawson**

ground in conflict situations expect risks to their mental health," she explained, but "journalists in newsrooms are suffering in silence the unexpected consequences to their well-being following their editing, day in and day out, extreme content for news reports.

"The NUJ urges employers to provide more support for staff to protect against "long-term mental health problems that will impact not only on their individual well-being but also their home and family life."



Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn addresses Trades Union Congress. Photo © **Tim Dawson**

Time to re-think the re-write

IT'S TIME to re-think the practice of rewriting stories as instant catch-ups. The issue has been brought to a head by *Private Eye* obtaining a copy of the *Daily Mail* style guide, which contains the following: "Attribution: The current official guidance is not to attribute quotes to other newspapers unless there is a threat of breach of copyright action, in which case ask for advice."

It is not, of course, just newspapers that the *Mail* declines to attribute. Over the summer Australian freelance Ginger Gorman invoiced its Australian website for AU\$2000 after it published rewritten versions of two of her stories, with no perceptible original research. The *Mail* refused to pay, saying "there's no copyright in ideas". This is true, in Australia as it is in the UK.

But is it ethical? And is it harming journalism? In days of yore, all the London papers would send people to King's Cross station of a night to obtain copies of their rivals' first editions as they went on the train to go oop North. They'd rush back to the office, where some poor schlub would rewrite the juicier stories in the paper's style and bung them in the second and subsequent editions.

Arguably, this served journal-

ism as a whole well. Someone who wouldn't read anything less than the *Times* could still be informed of much of what the *Mirror* had dug up – and sometimes vice versa. And the BBC news operation has long relied on rewrites for much the same reason.

Now, with all the papers online in one form or another... the practice is equivalent to the distinctly disreputable practice of "spinning". This refers, not to the dark arts of political persuasion, but to parasitic websites that exist purely to rewrite others' work, to garner slivers of ad revenue by poaching "hits".

The results can be amusing, especially when these parasitic sites use auto-spinning software that looks up key words in a thesaurus and bungs in one at random. But they're not informing anyone of anything.

Ginger Gorman was faced with two choices, as the law stands. She could swallow hard and move on; or she could try to find a very large wedge of cash to ask a court to rule that the *Mail*'s versions were "substantially similar" to the actual phrasing of her stories.

Others have gone to court. In July, local news website *Rochdale Online* won a case against the *Manchester Evening News*, which had used one

of its stories without either payment or attribution. The *Press Gazette* reports that the *MEN* defence in Small Claims Court was "there is no copyright in news" and since the article was not copied verbatim there was no breach of copyright. The court disagreed and awarded £200 plus £170 fees.

In the same week the *Independent* declined to pay an invoice – on the same increasingly shaky grounds – for a court report lifted from *Wales Online*. Four months later it agreed after all to pay a very modest £40 – while continuing to deny that there is any copyright issue.

Back at the *Mail*, *Private Eye* also reports that several US titles have blocked anyone using a computer connected via **dailymail.co.uk** from reading their sites.

What should be done? Online, there is little or no justification for "lifting". But for copyright to cover facts or ideas remains a terrible idea. Think, for starters, about a world in which you needed the permission of the Moloch Corporation to quote from its annual report. But for it not to cover "spinning" is looking increasingly untenable too. How to do that? Ideas on a postcard, please...

© **Mike Holderness**

New members meet

For members new to LFB or recently joined, or new to freelancing, there's a meeting on Thursday 26 October. It's a chance to meet other new members, with some more experienced journalists on hand to offer advice, hear about the mission of the Union, discover some of the resources on LFB's website www.londonfreelance.org and discuss work issues. It's at the Camera Café, Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY on **Thursday 26 October**, from 6pm. (The venue has a small museum of vintage cameras.) The nearest Tube is Holborn. These regular meetings are on the last Thursday of every third month. For a report on a successful new members' meeting earlier this year, see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1706newm.html