

Lords call for new press inquiry

THE HOUSE of Lords inflicted a defeat on the Government recently by passing an amendment to the Data Protection Bill demanding the implementation of the promised second part of the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press.

“Leveson 2” would – if it ever happens – investigate “corporate governance and management failures” in Her Majesty’s Press, looking at specific claims about phone-hacking at the *News of the World* and what went wrong with the original police investigation into phone hacking. It was delayed pending criminal prosecutions around phone hacking, then reportedly “quietly shelved” around December 2015. The Conservative Party’s 2017 election manifesto pledged that it would not proceed with Leveson 2.

The Lords vote followed a long and heated debate: Baroness Sheila Hollins gave an impassioned speech

about her personal experiences of press intrusion and data theft after the death of her daughter. Government ministers, including the new Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Matthew Hancock, denounced the vote as an attempt to curb press freedom. Reliant as it is on favourable coverage from certain national newspapers, the current Government is likely to seek to overturn the Lords’ amendment when the Bill returns to the House of Commons.

As we go to press, allegations are emerging about the conduct of investigators hired by newspapers that will probably make all of the above seem rather out of date by the time you read this. Watch this space.

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• For background to the current press regulation impasse, see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1611regu.html



The new Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Matt Hancock, when he was Minister for Skills in 2013.

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Crowdfund to stop the Murdoch bid for Sky

THE CAMPAIGN for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF) has launched a £20,000 crowdfunding campaign at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/stopmurdoch to stop the Murdochs’ bid to buy all of Sky. Rupert Murdoch has agreed a deal to sell off most of his film and TV assets to Disney, but this was framed as happening *after* the takeover. The bid is subject to the outcome of an inquiry by the Competition and

Markets Authority into broadcasting standards at the Murdochs’ 21st Century Fox and News Corp media organisations: on 23 January it provisionally ruled that the bid was “not in the public interest” but that will almost certainly be challenged by the Murdochs.

Contrariwise, on 14 February campaigning organisation avaaz.org won the right to a judicial review of a ruling by communications regula-

tor that Sky would remain a “fit and proper” broadcaster if taken over.

The £20,000 will fund a CPBF campaign worker and the production of campaign materials. LFB is proud to be affiliated to the CPBF. New Branch delegate to the Campaign Tony Levine was elected in January. See www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1803sky.html for updates and links.

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Libel update coming in Scotland, probably for the better

THE SCOTTISH Law Commission recently published its report on libel law reform: it’s at tinyurl.com/yd6tzzgj and it’s now gone to the Scottish Parliament for consideration of its implementation.

The report is partly an attempt to adopt into Scottish law many of

those reforms already enacted in the jurisdiction of England and Wales by its Defamation Act 2013. Its proposals include shortening the current three-year limit on libel actions to one year; updating “first publication” for the internet age and creating a specific public interest defence.

Other recommendations in the Commission’s report are a power to strike down “worthless or trivial” libel actions early and a requirement for the plaintiff to show that the libel causes “serious harm”. It also looks at “remedies”.

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More online

There are more stories and, we hope, updates to some of these, at www.londonfreelance.org/fl – and see NUJ President Tim Dawson’s column at www.londonfreelance.org/president

Europe has a free press enforcer again

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has a new Representative on Freedom of the Media: Harlem Désir. He leads the Organisation’s work monitoring and attempting to enforce unfettered freedom of expression in the 57 countries that are members.

Harlem is thus one of the few supra-national authorities whose responsibility is to defend press freedom. His role is likely to become

more important as the UK decouples from the EU and its enforcement of rights.

On the occasion of his visit to London in December to meet press freedom activists, regulators and government representatives, Harlem was interviewed by NUJ President and Freelance columnist Tim Dawson. You can read Tim’s report and see a video of his interview at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1801prez.html

