

will NOT face fines

SUPERMARKETS who bully small suppliers will no longer face the threat of fines after ministers caved in under pressure from the big retailers.

A new watchdog will have the power to name and shame supermarkets who rip off farmers - but will not be able to issue financial penalties.

Campaigners accused ministers of buckling under pressure from lobbying by large retailers, despite pledging to crack down on their ruthless tactics.

Supermarkets had warned that the sanctions could force them to pass on the costs to shoppers - a claim dismissed by campaigners, who said the competition would keep them from fulfilling the threat.

Retail giants including Tesco, Morrisons, Asda and Sainsbury's have been accused of

By **Gerri Peev**
Political Correspondent

fleeing suppliers by paying them rock-bottom prices or finding other ways to make them pay costs for items that have perished or not sold.

Other tactics include lowering the agreed price after an order has been delivered, changing an order at the last minute and leaving the supplier bearing the cost, delaying payments to firms - and sometimes forcing them to go bust because of the lack of cashflow - and insisting that they use specific, expensive hauliers to deliver their goods.

Some supermarkets even make suppliers pay for goods shoplifted from their stores, and charge them to top up the retail giants' profits when they are lower than expected. MPs are threatening to try to amend the legislation, which has its second

reading in the Commons on Monday, to give the new watchdog the power to fine.

Tory MP George Eustice said his family farm gave up supplying strawberries to supermarkets because of their tactics.

Mr Eustice, the MP for Cornwall and Redruth in Cornwall, added: 'This bill is an important step forward but there is a

establishment of an adjudicator but these watchdogs really need more teeth to be effective. What is disappointing is that there will be no powers to fine.

'We know the supermarkets have used their market dominance to take advantage of small suppliers. This bill has been watered down and there are numerous amendments that we need to make.'

ActionAid, the anti-poverty charity, said the Government would be scoring an 'own goal' if it did not give the adjudicator the power to fine.

Melanie Ward, the charity's head of advocacy, said: 'It is time for the Government to stand up to the power of supermarkets.'

'Only with the ability to hit big supermarkets where it hurts - their profit margins - will the watchdog be able to protect vulnerable farmers and producers around the world from being treated unfairly.'

'Watchdogs need more teeth'

case for toughening up the sanctions and giving the adjudicator more powers to fine.'

Labour MP Katy Clark - who sits on the powerful Commons business select committee which urged ministers to give the new adjudicator the power to issue penalties - said the legislation was 'disappointing'. She added: 'I welcome the

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had made him 'a figure of public hatred'. The BBC last night agreed to pay Lord McAlpine £185,000 plus legal costs.

This was followed by a grudging apology from the BJJ, which read: 'The bureau's trustees apologise to Lord McAlpine for the extent to which its contribution to the Newsnight broadcast on 2 November fell short of the high standards it expects and for any incorrect speculation about the identity of the politician that may have been encouraged by the bureau managing editor's tweet in advance of the broadcast.'

But Lord McAlpine said of his ordeal: 'It gets into your bones, it makes you angry, and that's extremely bad for you to be angry, and it gets into your soul and you just think there is something wrong with the world.'

At the Leveson Inquiry, the BJJ, which bragged it was the gold standard of investigative journalism, proposed a media levy that would force newspapers to fund groups such as itself.

As well as the bureau, Sir David is co-founder of the Media Standards Trust, the lobby group behind a huge amount of evidence presented to the Leveson Inquiry.

The Trust, which Sir David chaired until recently, subsequently spawned Hacked Off - the campaign group demanding press reform fronted by actor Hugh Grant and comedian Steve Coogan - which has boasted of its role in considerably expanding the Inquiry's original remit.

Sir David's friend and Trust co-founder is Julia Middleton with whom he heads an organisation called Common Purpose which receives millions of pounds of taxpayers' money from public servants sent on 'leadership' training courses. It is described as the Left's answer to the old boys' network.

Two more of Leveson's panel of advisers, ex-Ofcom chairman Lord Currie and Sir Paul Scott-Lee, ex-chief constable of West Midlands Police, have indirect connections with Common Purpose.

The Mail investigation has uncovered an incestuous network of political, business and financial links between Sir David, ex-chairman of the Financial Times, and individuals and organisations appearing before the Inquiry to demand statutory press regulation. It reveals:

■ Many of the witnesses who provided the

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most hostile anti-press evidence to Leveson are linked to senior figures at Hacked Off and the Media Standards Trust;

■ Significant funding for the Trust comes from a charitable trust of which Sir David is a trustee;

■ The Trust has strong links with Ofcom, the statutory media regulator which some suspect has ambitions to regulate Britain's free press;

■ Despite being formed by the Trust, which is campaigning for 'transparency and accountability in the news', Hacked Off refuses to detail the source of its own funding;

■ The 'prestigious' Trust-administered Orwell Prize for political writing was handed to a journalist who turned out to have made up his 'award-winning' articles;

■ Common Purpose is 'likely' to have breached the Data Protection Act - the charge levelled at the Leveson Inquiry against virtually all newspapers;

'Promoting their own ideological agenda'

■ It has strong links with powerful and controversial lobby and PR groups;

■ Common Purpose 'leaders' have had a significant influence on the appointments process in Whitehall.

Tory MP Philip Davies, who sits on the Commons culture, media and sport select committee, said: 'This is about a lot of people of dubious intentions setting up organisations to push their own opinions and inveigle their way into positions of influence. They are simply promoting their own ideological agenda in a surreptitious manner.'

'It makes you wonder, if we had statutory regulation of the press, just who would be sitting on such a body.'

Common Purpose, which once shared the same headquarters as the Media Stand-

ards Trust, charges up to £5,000 for a week-long course and claims more than 35,000 have 'graduated' in the UK and worldwide. The BBC spent more than £126,000 in a five-year period on its courses.

Among senior police officer 'graduates' of Common Purpose is Cressida Dick, the Scotland Yard commander in charge of the bungled operation that ended with the 2005 shooting of innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes.

Another lucrative connection between the police and Common Purpose involves the West Midlands Force. The force sent 27 West Midlands officers, including one assistant chief constable, on Common Purpose courses under Sir Paul Scott-Lee's leadership.

New Labour peer Lord Currie was the first chairman of Ofcom and the media regulator also sent people on the courses. Two of his board members have been involved with either the Media Standards Trust or Hacked Off. The Mail sent detailed questions to Sir David, Lord Currie and Sir Paul but none replied.

The Leveson Inquiry issued a statement on their behalf, saying: 'Before the assessors were formally appointed to their role they were each asked to declare any issues they felt might cause a conflict to arise with their position on the Inquiry.'

'As part of that process, each assessor discussed those matters with Lord Justice Leveson and provided a written declaration accordingly.'

'He was satisfied then that there was nothing in their disclosures which caused him concern or justified any of them not taking up this role.'

Common Purpose chief executive Miss Middleton said: 'I am proud of my private and personal association with the Media Standards Trust, started by many people in response to widespread feelings that increased transparency in the media should be encouraged.' She said none of the organisations she was connected with had a role in selecting the assessors.

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