

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Informed

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National Executive Council update

The National Executive Council (NEC) met on 26 June and remembered the lives of prominent union figures John Matthews, John Bailey, and Veronica Guerin.

The quarterly meeting fell on the 30th anniversary of Guerin's murder, with Séamus Dooley our assistant general secretary penning a tribute for the NUJ website to his former colleague, who he remembered as "as a dogged, ambitious journalist [...] as a fanatic sports fan, as a political junkie, as someone who loved life." NEC members noted that Guerin's murder serves as a reminder of the threats that journalists continue to face - both in the UK and around the world - with so many unwillingly losing their lives to preserve press freedom.

The NEC ratified various motions and decisions in a packed agenda. The Council carried a motion by the newly-formed AI & Copyright Committee recognising the need for 'personality' rights to protect creative workers whose living depends on their image, while calling for any legislation to include safeguards that explicitly protect newsgatherers' ability to take photos and videos for reporting purposes. The NEC additionally endorsed proposals by the Scottish Executive Council (SEC) to merge branches as well as new reporting guidelines on sexual violence developed by the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) coalition and Dr Alessia Tranchese, an associate professor of language, feminism and digital media at the University of Portsmouth. The EVAW coalition and Tranchese discussed the guidelines at a recent Ethics Council webinar, a summary of which was published in the June edition of NUJ Informed.

The NEC also agreed the union's



motions to TUC Congress, held from 13-16 September in Brighton. Taxing the tech giants and protecting public broadcasting were the agreed topics, with the Council later sending a message of solidarity and backing to members at the BBC. Industry decline is not inevitable - it can and must be fought. While the union has secured strong support from the government - including private and public **commitments** from the culture secretary to pursue worker representation and remove political appointees - the union's real power and leverage comes from our members. In a unanimously agreed statement, the NEC noted that "cuts to the BBC will have a huge impact on full-time and freelance journalists as well as the wider creative industry" and offered full support to any industrial strategy BBC members deem necessary to fight for jobs and programming.

Chapels and branches have since taken action to show solidarity with BBC members. The South West branch joined the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival from 17-19 July to publicise a **joint petition** launched by the NUJ and sister unions, calling on the Prime Minister

and Director General to protect the BBC and its workers. On the same weekend, the Birmingham & Coventry branch organised a special meeting to discuss resistance to the cuts with John McDonnell MP, NUJ parliamentary group secretary, joining for over 45 minutes to share plans and ideas. The branch agreed to publicise the petition, write to their MP using our **template** letter, and pass a motion backing the BBC and its workers. Chapels and branches looking to adopt similar solidarity statements can find a template motion on the **NUJ website**.

Our new **Organising, Defending, Winning strategy** sets out how the union will work to drive recruitment, retention and organising at every level. In the NEC's afternoon session, members split into groups to discuss how to put the strategy into action by building a stronger culture of activism across the union. Discussions focused on eligibility thresholds for new members, potential reforms to membership grades, and the union's Fighting Fund. No decisions were taken but the discussions will inform the NEC's motions to the next Delegate Meeting in April 2027.

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NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

Live from Laura



From strike action at The Lancet to upholding press freedom across the UK and Ireland, NUJ General Secretary Laura Davison provides the latest news on the union's wide-ranging work.

Colleagues, I hope you had a good summer and managed to keep cool. There's a lot to update you on since our last edition of NUJ Informed - particularly concerning the future of local news and our public service media, journalists' safety, press freedom, and our ongoing industrial work.

In June, the BBC announced that the first wave of cuts could lead to a reduction of 550 roles across the news, nations, and content teams and the closure of cherished programming. This was followed by a decision to cut dedicated foreign stringers (correspondents) covering 14 European countries for the BBC. I wrote to the new Prime Minister and Culture Secretary, reiterating the union's calls for urgent government intervention. I'm also engaging on these matters with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and our parliamentary group. As part of our **Back The BBC** campaign, we created a **template** letter for members to send to their MPs, urging them to sign our EDM, and launched a joint union **petition** through the TUC so that the public can get involved.

Our regular engagement with DCMS has focussed on obtaining follow-up detail in the published Local News Strategy, which we **welcomed** alongside a £12 million Local News Fund as "a positive start" in providing much needed

support to the industry.

As online mis- and disinformation poses an ever-increasing threat to our information ecosystem and democracy, the NUJ **responded** to the UK government's media green paper, which proposes legislation forcing social media companies to make "trustworthy news" prominent and easily discoverable.

The union has expressed concerns around Comcast's proposed takeover of ITV and the implications on jobs, local news, and media concentration, and submitted a **response** to the competition regulator's inquiry.

I want to thank colleagues at the NUJ Scottish Office, and SEC and NEC members for making me welcome on my recent visit to Glasgow. It was especially good to talk about our excellent training programme in Scotland and how we can maximise opportunities for members as well as to hear more about our **union's work** in tackling the historic anti-trade union culture at DC Thomson. It was also a pleasure to talk again to two of our STV reps to hear first-hand how they plan to progress issues around pay and workload burdens generated by Ofcom's very disappointing decision to approve cutting the STV North programme.

Our members at The Lancet only gained recognition in February but they are already banding together with purpose to push for better pay, **voting** overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action scheduled for this month. Please



give them your support by sending solidarity statements to campaigns@nuj.org.uk.

Journalists' safety and press freedom remain high on the union's agenda. In July, we welcomed Vincent Kearney's landmark victory in his tribunal case against MI5 and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) over their sustained unlawful surveillance (see column over page). I attended the first day of the hearing in February along with the Assistant General Secretary and called for a full public inquiry into surveillance of journalists in Northern Ireland.

The safety of our members in Northern Ireland has been at the forefront of our minds in recent months. We **responded** to the not guilty verdict in the Lyra McKee trial and welcomed PSNI's renewed appeal for information; and repeated calls for a public inquiry into Martin O'Hagan's murder, including in our letter to the UK Home Secretary. The riots in Belfast, which led to intimidation and attacks against journalists, reinforced the importance of our work on journalists' safety and our **Safety Tracker** reporting tool, which we continue to develop. I also **responded** to government research on journalist safety in the media and to Reform UK **banning journalists** from its party conference and **urged** the Home Office to correct advice on photography in public spaces.

The NUJ's parliamentary group Secretary and numerous MPs **demand**ed universally applicable and robust legislation to clamp down on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) in a Westminster debate. Promisingly, the Courts Minister welcomed our calls and said the government is taking steps to bring about new protections - read more on page 11.

It was a privilege to attend the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) centenary congress earlier this year and to be elected onto its executive committee. The importance of our union's work alongside our affiliate has



Vindication for Vincent

In July, we welcomed a landmark decision by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) to order MI5 and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to pay £20,000 in damages to journalist and our member Vincent Kearney over sustained unlawful surveillance.

The judgement was a damning indictment of the police and security services and an unambiguous vindication of Vincent Kearney and investigative journalism.

A three-day hearing in February laid bare **the impact** of unlawful surveillance lasting more than a decade on Kearney's personal and professional life. The tribunal heard how Kearney was **"treated as a suspect"** for his reporting while working for BBC Northern Ireland,

with police and security forces breaching his right to protect his sources and subjecting him to considerable risk as a journalist working in a post-conflict society.

"This is a hugely significant ruling," said Fran McNulty, NUJ joint president. "We know that MI5 accessed information and data deliberately to identify journalistic sources, a most egregious overreach. I commend Vincent and the BBC for taking the action, and for holding those in power to account. It has been a difficult and stressful time for Vincent and his family, and the NUJ has been privileged to support Vincent during the process." The NUJ has underlined the need for a full public inquiry into surveillance of journalists in Northern Ireland.

been underscored by significant global events in recent months. We continued to **publicly condemn** persistent targeting of journalists in Lebanon and Palestine by Israeli forces and **supported** calls by MPs to facilitate investigations at the International Criminal Court - which I reiterated in a recent letter to the new

Foreign Secretary. We highlighted **support** for sister unions in the United States fighting visa restrictions against foreign journalists. We also worked closely with the IFJ to highlight the arrest of photographer and NUJ member Klaus Thymann by police in Uganda, who released him after five days.

The State of Media in Wales

David Nicholson, NUJ Welsh Executive Council co-chair, looks ahead to the union's national conference in Cardiff on 19 September.

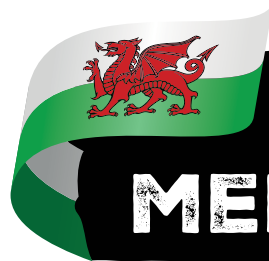
Former broadcaster and First Minister of Wales Rhun ap Iorwerth will give the keynote opening address at the NUJ's major conference on the future of Welsh media, democracy and public interest journalism.

The conference will take place at Cardiff's Sophia Gardens on September 19 covering both broadcasting and publishing. The First Minister is still a proud member of the NUJ, and is passionate about journalism and the power it has to help shape a nation's future and culture.

We have asked ap Iorwerth to flesh out his government's recent commitment to strengthen public interest journalism as one of its key priorities.

The First Minister has also been asked to consider if there is a natural synergy between the Devolved Broadcasting Authority that the new Welsh government is committed to and a Wales Media Institute that the NUJ and the industry proposed in its July 2023 [report](#). Of and for Wales: towards a sustainable future for public interest journalism.

Tickets are going fast for the



THE STATE OF MEDIA IN WALES:

Shaping Our Future

CONFERENCE 19.9.26

conference but there are still a few left for members to attend this important discussion about the industry in Wales.

Professor Stephen Cushion from Cardiff University has been scrutinising how the media performed in May's Senedd election, and his team will set out their analysis and thoughts to the conference as a precursor to the panel discussions on broadcasting and publishing.

Devolved broadcasting will be on the agenda - as will the key question of whether this would be helpful for Wales, or whether it so complicated to unpick that it might be a non-starter.

Funding bodies like Creative Wales and the Books Council of Wales will talk about the difficulties in funding the sector and what needs to be done to improve that, along with Planet editor Emily Trahair.

The main industry players, including BBC Wales, ITV Wales, S4C, Reach, Golwg, local radio stations, Will Hayward, and Caerphilly Observer will take part in the conference.

The BBC will talk about Charter Renewal and what this means for Wales, along

with the impact of the proposed 10-15% jobs cuts to the corporation's news journalists. The takeover of ITV by Sky, and how this may impact on the Welsh news and current affairs provided by ITV Wales, will also be discussed.

Filling the news deserts of Wales will form part of the discussion. The Local Democracy Reporter (LDR) scheme is excellent but it breaks down when there is no local paper to carry the reporter's stories. That means, for example, that the BBC LDR covers Neath Port Talbot council business, but the local community in Port Talbot never see the reports because of its lack of a newspaper. Can the BBC be persuaded to make Local Democracy Reporter (LDR) council reports available to the public in Wales?

There are many small ways in which the fragile flower of public interest journalism can be nurtured in Wales and the conference will discuss any solution, big or small, that can improve what we offer the public in Wales.

ACTION: Book your place. Space is limited and tickets are going fast.

Industrial action at The Lancet

NUJ members at The Lancet have overwhelmingly voted in favour of industrial action as part of their long-running pay dispute with management.

The ballot results from 4 September show 94.5% supported strike action and

97.8% supported action short of a strike on a turnout of 87.5%. The NUJ served notice to the company that members will engage in both forms of action later this month.

The NUJ Lancet chapel rejected the company's pay offer following extensive

negotiations. Staff have absorbed rising workloads, increasing expectations and sustained inflation. This has led to a reduction of the real-terms value of their salaries, leaving many employees significantly worse off than they were five years ago despite their growing experience, expertise, and responsibilities.

Update

Delegate Meeting 2027 explainer

What should the NUJ campaign on? What issues matter most to journalists and media workers? And what should the union be doing to support its members in a changing industry?

These are not decisions made behind closed doors by a small group of people. Every member has a voice.

One of the most important places where you can make your voice heard is the Delegate Meeting (DM). Whether you are a seasoned delegate or new union member, DM offers an opportunity to have your say on the issues the union campaigns on, the policies it adopts and the priorities it sets.

Held every two years, DM is a chance for members from all parts of the union to come together, shape the NUJ's work, and build the connections that make our union thrive.

Our last DM in 2025 in Blackpool saw debates and heartening solidarity in the face of challenges affecting our members across the movement and journalists around the world - and next year is another opportunity to do the same.

Our next DM will be held in Brighton in April 2027. This may seem a long way away but we're encouraging branches to start preparing early. The process begins with branches meeting to discuss issues affecting members in their workplace and the wider media industry. A motion is then submitted by a branch. This is simply a proposal asking the union to take

a particular action or adopt a particular position, but it's important to write it in a specific form to avoid it being rejected.

Here's an example of a motion passed last year: "This DM is concerned about the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) both in its potential effect on jobs and workloads, and for its effects in undermining editorial integrity and the public's trust in the media..."

"This DM instructs the NEC to lobby Government and relevant organisations and to campaign or support campaigns that use of creators' work for training AI models must be on the basis of affirmative consent, an opt-in system, not forcing creators to try and opt-out their work."

A motion cannot instruct or ask DM to do anything itself as DM is a conference, not an organisation. Check out our guide for writing motions for more information.

Delegates discuss the motions, suggest amendments and debate the proposals by speaking for or against it. Delegates then vote on the motions and amendments. If a motion is passed, it becomes union policy and helps guide the NUJ's campaigning and work over the coming years.

For instance, the union has responded to the motion above by strengthening campaigning on artificial intelligence in the media industry. We have responded to government consultations, including the UK government's ***call for evidence***

on AI licensing and copyright in creative industries, and the Joint Oireachtas Committee's ***call for input*** on artificial intelligence and copyright. We continue to reflect members' concerns over the imposition of AI in the workplace and joined sister unions in Westminster to directly lobby MPs. And most recently, we wrote to the new AI Minister to highlight the need for an opt-in mechanism for both individual and collective licensing, and fair remuneration for creative workers.

If you're unsure how to get involved, a good place to start is attending your local branch meeting to take part in discussions and help decide which issues your branch wants to address. You can contribute to the development of motions, put yourself forward as a delegate and, if selected, speak and vote at the Delegate Meeting on behalf of your branch colleagues. The deadline to submit motions is 18 November.

We expect all colleagues attending DM to treat each other with respect and act in solidarity.

The DM is a positive event and a chance for members to come together and meet colleagues across the journalism industry. And first-time delegates always receive a very warm welcome from conference, so don't shy away!

Your experience at work matters and your voice, no matter how new, can help shape the NUJ. Have your say and get involved in next year's DM.

Protecting photographers' rights

The NUJ has written to the Home Office requesting the immediate correction of misleading information on photographing and filming people in public places.

An information leaflet shared with asylum seekers in August suggests that people in the UK "could be arrested by

the police" if they "take pictures or videos of someone without their permission [...] including in public spaces, like streets or parks".

These statements misrepresent the law and risk misleading asylum seekers and the wider public on the right to photograph and film people in public

without permission. "The union is very concerned that the spread of inaccurate information could expose our members to increased hostility and harassment as well as wrongful accusations of criminality and unjustifiable stops by the police," said Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary. "This would undermine journalists' right to report and the public's right to know."

Equality

Repping diversity and inclusion in the industry

Ashitha Nagesh and Faarea Masud reflect on their experience as NUJ equality reps.



Ashitha Nagesh

The work of equality reps has never been more important in our industry.

There was a long-awaited spike in commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) issues six years ago - followed by, unfortunately, a deep and sustained plummet. The term DEI has been tainted over the years with divisive narratives about "culture wars", and these days is met with defunding, disillusion, and eye rolls. Despite, or maybe because of this, the work of equality reps in the workplace is now particularly vital.

Equality has always been at the heart of my work, both as a union rep and as a journalist. I'm currently a Senior Reporter for BBC News, mainly focusing on long-form features for our digital platforms. Before this, I was the BBC's Community Affairs Correspondent, specialising in telling stories that mattered to ethnic minority communities across the UK.

Ethnic minorities are

underrepresented in our industry. We make up about 18% of the general population, but only about 12% of UK journalists are from ethnic minority backgrounds. When I started working for newspapers back in 2014, this number was far more dire - about 6%, compared to the 94% of the journalism industry that was white.

And representation in the industry is only one part of the picture. Minority ethnic journalists, for example, report feeling belittled in the newsroom, or pigeonholed in terms of the stories they are expected or allowed to cover.

Disabled journalists, meanwhile, make up about 22% of the industry, roughly in line with the general population; this may seem encouraging on the surface, but according to the NUJ, they are overwhelmingly concentrated in lower-paid and freelance jobs. Similarly, LGBT+ journalists are overrepresented in the industry - making up about 11% of newsrooms, compared to between 4% and 7% of the UK population; but a **2021 report from the NUJ** found that about a third of LGBT+ colleagues had faced bullying, harassment or discrimination at work because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Age and class discrimination are still prevalent in our industry too, while journalism still has a wider gender pay gap than other UK industries.

All of this is why, when the opportunity presented itself, I became an equality rep - because I feel these issues at my core. I care deeply about both the BBC and the wider journalism industry, and want it to thrive; but it can only do that when the people actually producing the journalism

are treated with respect and integrity at work, and are given the confidence and security to tell the stories that matter to them without being pigeonholed into doing so.

As an equality rep, part of your role will of course be dealing with casework for people who are alleging discrimination - whether that's bullying and harassment, a pay inequality issue, or an unfair redundancy. Another part is often about wider equality efforts in the organisation, working with HR to improve working conditions for minority staff. And then there are cuts, and the need to make sure that certain minority groups aren't being disproportionately affected - something that will now, unfortunately, form a large part of our efforts at the BBC, with the swingeing cuts that have recently been announced. All of this work is crucial, so that NUJ members from minority groups feel that we are representing them properly.

This work is important, fulfilling, and essential to the future of both our industry and our union.



Faarea Masud

I'm Faarea Masud, a business journalist who writes daily breaking news articles for the BBC national news website from its HQ in London.

I became an equality rep because I

Equality

passionately believe in equal rights for all human beings, and want to advocate for an environment that allows everyone the ability to live their life with dignity.

As an equality rep, that means I advocate for journalists with protected characteristics to be given an equal chance at success as everyone else. No matter your race, sexuality, religion, family background, gender, class, age or any other thing that makes you feel less than, you should tell stories and practice the honourable act of journalism as equally as everyone that has come before you. It is in your heritage as much as everyone else's.

I also advocate for those with no obvious protected characteristics, but who still could face systemic discrimination. Family abuse, a history of sexual abuse, neglect, poverty, abusive partners and a host of other factors, can often make you feel, and act, like you're not equal to everyone else. I am here to help provide equity to those people by finding ways to remove structural inequalities that prevent them from performing their best in the world of journalism.

In practice, the primary thing I do is keep an eagle-eye out for structural inequality and call it out where I see it. I remain proactive in making sure we recruit staff from all backgrounds. In staff meetings I am vocal if I see too much of a monoculture emerging. Monocultures hinder our ability to do journalism properly - newsrooms should reflect the society they are speaking to, otherwise they lose value.

It also means that when a member comes to me with concerns, I listen and direct them to resources that could help them fight their corner. I attend regular training that keeps me up to date with the latest equality legislation, trends, needs and ethics. I have sat in on discussions between a member and their manager. I recently spoke on a panel with a 40-strong audience at BBC Salford, encouraging people from black and ethnic backgrounds to join the BBC.

I've helped an apprentice find their feet and call out bad practice where they've seen it.

Truthfully speaking though, the role of equality rep often just means being proud and loud to exist as you are, so others feel the confidence to also do so themselves. Sometimes, your very smile is an act of defiance in a polarising world where forces seek to divide us for their own gain.

Workplace structures are often set up to cater to the majority. And as a news team, we march forward to journalistic success following those structures. But sometimes we forget that there are also minorities who are contributing to that success, and they are sometimes forgotten because they don't fit into the structure. They deserve equal reward. Equal chances at promotion.

Sometimes, minorities can't fully contribute because the structure doesn't allow them to - though their passion, ability and competence is no less than the larger group. I see it as my role to identify where these gaps are and address them.

I would urge others to come forward as an equality rep because there is still not enough representation in the media that accurately reflects the national demographic.

I've seen how far a helping hand can go in lifting people out of workplace dejection. Such people already feel small and don't want to highlight their smallness by vocalising it. All you need to do is advocate for that person.

The NUJ's George Viner scholarship was awarded to me in 2009, which helped me, a British-Bangladeshi, get my first serious job in a newsroom when there were not many of us around. That helping hand gave me confidence to fight for myself when a former employer sought to discriminate against me, because the award gave me a sense of pride and self-recognition. I hope to pass forward those effects of hope on everyone I meet.

Building on 'Back The BBC'

Campaigning for government policy change is almost always a long and complex process that requires patience and persistence. It's positive to see the union's demands for an updated BBC Charter landing well with decisionmakers and prompting promising commitments. Our *Back The BBC* campaign lays out three key priorities: secure funding; proper representation, and real independence.

MPs from across the political spectrum have responded supportively to **letters** from our members calling for them to 'Back The BBC'. After meeting our BBC reps and parliamentary group earlier this year, in July the Culture Secretary **said** that the UK government is "almost certainly" going to pursue worker representation on the BBC board while removing political appointments, noting the "compelling case" the NUJ had made.

The union has long called for at least 25% of board seats at the broadcaster to be filled by employees from non-management roles. To promote greater independence and protect against political interference, the BBC board and its chair should be chosen by an arms-length body.

However, the central issue is going to be the financial future of the broadcaster. The NUJ continues to urge the UK government to ensure Charter Renewal provides secure long-term funding that reverses the impact of damaging cuts over many years and gives journalists the resources they need. We still await a firm commitment on this issue. The union is also urging the UK government to urgently intervene to stop cuts to around 2,000 jobs and vital programming.

Feature

NUJ



Surveillance and smears

Tara Conlan explores claims that Labour Together hired APCO Worldwide to investigate numerous reporters and their sources as the NUJ continues to campaign for transparency and accountability.

When Peter Geoghegan and Khadija Sharife won Private Eye's Paul Foot prize for their entry 'How Labour Together hired a PR firm to target journalists', it was in recognition of an investigation into the surveillance of reporters.

But it has led to the revelation that politicians were also monitored - an issue that could have further consequences for the government and democracy.

The NUJ and its parliamentary group are demanding an independent inquiry into the matter, which Geoghegan's reader-funded newsletter Democracy for Sale first shone a spotlight on earlier this year.

As Private Eye described it, Democracy for Sale "uncovered how campaign group Labour Together hired a PR firm to build dossiers on reputable journalists with the intent to discredit them. The investigation led to the resignation of former Labour Together chief Josh Simons from his post

as parliamentary secretary in the Cabinet Office."

The story began in the summer of 2024 when Labour got into power and Geoghegan, who had been looking previously into Conservative party funding, turned his attention to the party's finances.

He was struck by how little follow-up coverage there was from the 2023 story broken by Sunday Times journalists Gabriel Pogrund and Harry Yorke, and investigative journalist Paul Holden, which revealed that influential thinktank Labour Together had not declared significant financial donations when it was under the influence of Morgan McSweeney and then Simons. McSweeney later became Kier Starmer's head of staff, giving the story additional relevance.

As Geoghegan explained: "That's a really big, significant story. If that was the Conservative party, people would be going crazy." He realised Labour Together "was actually a very interesting organisation, something I hadn't really seen in British politics" that was giving money from donors to potential prospective MPs, so "kind of acting like a political party, but without any of the regulations...around political parties", which was unusual.

He and Sharife, whom he had worked with on the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, began looking into the story and eventually obtained documents that showed how PR firm APCO Worldwide had been hired to investigate the journalists behind the Labour Together story to find its sources.

"I was really shocked when I got these documents. I hadn't really considered that Labour Together would do something like [that] but I could start to see maybe this is why the story had died."

Some journalists were allegedly reluctant to follow up as they did not want to burn their contacts. But after much painstaking investigation into the background of the story and why it had not got more traction ("it was a lot of work,

it was quite an involved story even before publication") Geoghegan and Sharife laid the groundwork for publishing their article.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 2026 McSweeney came to wider public attention over advising Starmer to appoint Peter Mandelson as the UK's ambassador to the United States.

Democracy for Sale broke their story on 5 February, revealing how APCO Worldwide had been paid at least £30,000 "to investigate journalists that were digging into how its undeclared funding bankrolled Keir Starmer's successful Labour leadership campaign."

They included Pogrand, Yorke, the Guardian's Henry Dyer, Declassified's John McAvoy, plus other journalists classed as "significant persons of interest". It was also revealed that in 2023, APCO's reports discussed potential "leverage" over other reporters and that the work was led by former Times journalist turned APCO head of European media relations Tom Harper.

As Democracy for Sale put it, "APCO's briefings suggested - without providing any evidence - that one possible source of the Sunday Times story about Labour Together's funding was a Russian or Chinese hack of the Electoral Commission. It is understood that the contents of some of the documents were shared with other journalists on Fleet Street, seemingly in an attempt to discredit the initial story."

APCO also looked into Holden's outlet, Shadow World Investigations, a London-based outlet run by him and fellow South African Andrew Feinstein, who stood as an independent against Starmer for his seat in the 2024 general election. The PR firm's December 2023 report "plays up Feinstein's support for Jeremy Corbyn and his appearances on Russia Today," said Democracy for Sale - more on the relevance of that later.

McSweeney resigned on 8 February. Simons stepped down as an MP in May, which Geoghegan argues is now even

"more significant" as he made way for Andy Burnham to run.

Questions still remain. The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) said it would launch an investigation into APCO but Geoghegan is still awaiting an update from them.

He points out how the surveillance of journalists has a chilling effect: "This has definitely made me think, given the work I do, and given that this behaviour goes on [...] I think at the very least we need to find out what actually happened. The scales have really been tipped awfully in the wrong direction. It still needs a proper inquiry into what happened."

John McDonnell, the NUJ's parliamentary group secretary, agrees. As Geoghegan has done, McDonnell, Corbyn and other MPs have put in subject access requests to find out what data APCO has on them. Corbyn has around 500 references and McDonnell 115 references, with about 14 pages of redactions. "The redactions are pretty appalling. You'll have reference to a report of some sort, but you don't know what the details are. You think well why are they collecting that information?" McDonnell notes.

He raised the issue of an independent inquiry under Starmer's tenure and is doing the same to Burnham, aiming to bring the matter to the floor of the House of Commons again this month. "I'm hoping under the Burnham regime we'll get that inquiry."

The NUJ has long campaigned for the cessation of - and consequences paid over - the surveillance of reporters. High-profile cases recently include the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Metropolitan Police unlawfully monitoring journalists Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey. MI5 and the PSNI used surveillance on Vincent Kearney for over a decade - for which they had to pay him £20,000 damages.

As McDonnell says: "How can we stand by and witness the attempts to smear journalists and not at least have an independent investigation? Because one

of the things we'd like to come out [of this] is what further protections journalists need; particularly when you've got an organisation that specifically targeted them."

If there is an objection to a Labour Together investigation then McDonnell says it should go back to the Commons to be debated because, "we might be looking at legislative mechanisms in the future to protect people." The NUJ has called for "stricter legislation to prohibit private entities from gathering or purchasing data on journalists for the purpose of identifying sources."

He points to the new Public Office (Accountability) Bill, known as the Hillsborough Law - which introduced a new professional and legal duty of candour - meaning "public officials must act with honesty and integrity at all times" and a new offence for "misleading the public."

With the list of organisations it covers yet to be unveiled as it goes to committee stage, McDonnell argues: "That duty of candour shouldn't just be state institutions. It should also be those organisations that are seeking to, in any way, influence government practice or policy [...] like lobbying bodies, agencies like APCO and organisations associated with political parties like Labour Together."

Journalists are targeted by people who are "trying to manipulate the system", he says, because the "last thing they want is sunlight and transparency" but journalism "is one of the foundations of a democracy."

McDonnell concludes the Labour Together issue "strikes at the heart of everything we want [for] a true democracy: openness, transparency and [those with] the agency to deliver that are investigative journalists."

"We're seeing, I think, an assault on that very basis of democratic practice - which is that openness and transparency - and the ability for journalists to be able to investigate and report without threat of sanction or smearing."

Report

Unpaid internships webinar

Alexandria Slater, NUJ campaigns & communications officer, reports from the latest event held by the Student and Early Careers Network.

The Student and Early Careers Network's recent webinar on unpaid internships and the National Minimum Wage (NMW) gave our student members a practical guide to understanding when unpaid work is lawful and when it isn't.

The session was led by Bradley Lawrence, HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) senior compliance officer. Drawing on his experience investigating employers across different sectors and company sizes, Lawrence explained how HMRC enforces minimum wage law and what members can do if they believe they have been underpaid.

One of the key messages was that being called an "intern" does not determine whether someone is entitled to the minimum wage. HMRC's guidance makes clear that "interns" have no special legal status for NMW purposes. Instead, the important question is whether the individual is classed as a "worker" for the organisation. This can include situations where there is a written, oral or implied agreement to work; the person is expected to attend or work particular hours; or they receive something of value in return - including money, benefits, or a promise of paid future work.

The webinar helpfully highlighted exceptions where work can be unpaid.

Students undertaking work experience that is a required part of a higher education course do not qualify for NMW where the placement is no longer than one year and takes place before the course ends. There's also a difference between carrying out work and shadowing. Someone who is just observing, listening and learning without completing tasks is not considered a worker that is entitled to NMW.

Volunteering is another category where the minimum wage does not apply. HMRC says genuine volunteers who provide their time freely are not under an obligation to provide their services. However they may be entitled to money to cover expenses, which is usually limited to food, drink, travel or any equipment you need to buy.

The webinar offered an important reminder for students and early career workers who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation when trying to get a foot in the industry door. Unpaid does not automatically mean unlawful, but calling work an internship or placement does not automatically make it lawful either.

Participants were also shown how concerns about underpayment can be raised and escalated, including the role of HMRC and the support available through unions. Keeping records of hours worked, agreements, payments and what was expected from an internship can be particularly important if a dispute



does arise; a paper trail will be your best defence.

The Student and Early Careers Network will be hosting more events similar to this to help members navigate a way to a career in the industry. The network is open to anyone aged 16 or over who is studying journalism, media, publishing, photography, public relations and communications, or any other journalism and media related courses. The network helps students make connections through local branches; provides guest speakers for students' courses and student-organised events; and offers practical support, including around student press cards that help our members to be identified as legitimate newsgatherers outside their campus. Contact campaigns@nuj.org.uk if you'd like to join the network.

The next journoration

Journalism is one of the most important professions in a democracy. Yet many young people still feel it isn't a career for them or don't fully understand the opportunities available.

To bridge this gap, the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)

launched a campaign, 'Where your story goes', to help 14-18-year-olds discover the many ways they can build a career in journalism: from reporting and investigations to podcasting, video production and data storytelling.

The campaign's **dedicated site** features an interactive personality

quiz for young people to explore which journalism roles could suit them best. They can also hear from five young journalists working at leading national and local outlets. In partnership with the Financial Times, a careers guide is also being distributed to over 35,000 teachers and education providers across the UK. The NUJ and NCTJ continue to campaign for the restoration of strategic grants funding for journalism education.

Campaign

Stopping SLAPPs

The NUJ parliamentary group made a telling contribution in a Westminster debate on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) as MPs returned from recess on 1 September.

"SLAPPs stifle free speech and undermine the right of the general public to know information," said John McDonnell MP, NUJ parliamentary group secretary. "There is a deterrence effect: they are a form of intimidation against telling the truth." McDonnell pointed out that journalists "had been the main target of SLAPPs" with some incurring devastating legal costs "just to try to demonstrate that they have been writing truthful analyses."

Filed by those with thin skins and thick wallets, SLAPPs attempt to silence critical speech. Claimants file or threaten baseless lawsuits to bury journalists, whistleblowers, campaigners, academics, and other publishers in legal costs and lengthy court cases. This places a huge financial and emotional burden on journalists and media organisations.

SLAPPs aim to instil fear and deter reporting. For small publishers and freelance journalists who don't have the backing of large legal teams, financial resources or support structures, avoiding publication can seem the most appropriate course of action to



prevent bankruptcy. Where publication proceeds, reports may be watered down in fear of legal action. This means stories - including those about misconduct, corruption, and injustice - go untold.

For years the NUJ has been campaigning as part of the Anti-SLAPP Coalition for the government to introduce standalone, robust, universally applicable legislation. Prior to being elected, the Labour government pledged to "tackle the use of SLAPPs to protect investigative journalism." Noting disappointment that anti-SLAPP provisions had been omitted from the King's Speech, McDonnell said that "now is the time to pick up the pace [...]" The NUJ is part of the Anti-SLAPP Coalition. The proposals put forward include: clear, 10-point criteria to identify SLAPPs; a higher merits threshold for likely success at trial; and a filter mechanism for swift disposal of actions that clearly seek to gag individual journalists and others. We

welcome the government's engagement now - hopefully including with the NUJ over these coming weeks - so that we can get this legislation on the statute book as rapidly as possible and protect freedom of speech."

Other MPs similarly called on the government to urgently introduce comprehensive legislation. "The Justice Secretary has said that legislation will be brought forward, but the King's Speech has been and gone, so what is the government's plan?" asked Dr Kieran Mullan, Conservative MP for Bexhill and Battle. "If the answer today is only warm words, I think the 111 peers who signed the cross-party letter, the editors of The Times, The Sun and The Guardian, the National Union of Journalists, the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition and every Member who has spoken in this debate are perhaps entitled to a little something more."

Sarah Sackman, courts and legal services minister, responded to MPs' speeches by welcoming calls for universal anti-SLAPP legislation, stating "we have begun to take the stepping stones towards that universal framework." The parliamentary session concluded with a motion recognising that SLAPPs pose a "critical threat" to press freedom, noting that existing anti-SLAPP provisions are "ineffective" and "insufficient", and calling for the government to urgently introduce new legislation that "filters out abusive lawsuits swiftly and fairly."

Watch this space

In late August the NUJ responded to the government's UK media green paper, which proposes legislation forcing social media companies to make "trustworthy news" prominent and easily discoverable, particularly at times of social unrest or crisis.

The union agreed that online misinformation is a growing problem

that needs addressing but warned that the state must not be the arbiter of what is and isn't "trustworthy" as this could allow any government to shut down criticism and scrutiny.

The union stressed that the government would need to avoid adverse effects, such as the systemic silencing of freelancers and independent media voices who provide audiences

with well-researched, quality information, and hold power to account.

The response further pushed for a government-funded nationwide media literacy initiative and stronger regulation that clamps down on tech companies that facilitate harmful and misleading content. It also strongly opposed ditching digital terrestrial television in the absence of universal broadband access, as this would only exacerbate the issue of digital exclusion.

Event

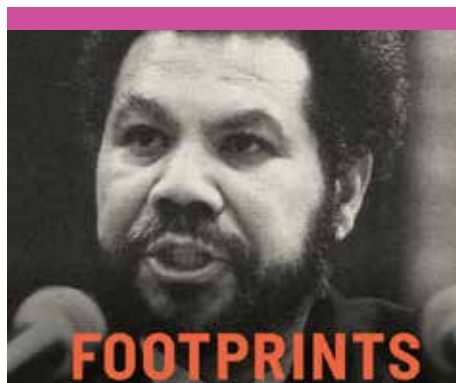
Long Live Lionel

Jim Boumelha remembers the NUJ's first Black president Lionel Morrison ahead of a special event at Headland House on 30 September.

When I joined the union's national executive in the early 80s, Lionel was one of its first members to welcome me and wish me luck. Although we represented different sectors, I discovered over time that we had quite a few things in common - being refugees of African heritage, being both acutely aware of liberation struggles, and having clocked years of frenzied activism. While I was then still a rookie, a rebellious Father of Chapel, Lionel had already behind him years of wisdom and experience.

Having just emerged from the Wapping dispute, the NUJ started getting engulfed in some of the stormiest years of its history with Margaret Thatcher in power unleashing her onslaught on trade unions. These were challenging times. And throughout these years, what always mattered to Lionel was to put his inexhaustible energy at the service of the downtrodden, those who suffer injustice and those who bear undeserved pain.

Having cut his teeth in the epic battles against Apartheid in his home country, South Africa, Lionel had no fear throwing himself head over heels in everything he embarked on, in particular making the NUJ and its members recognise and fight racism in the media and fight to remove



plenty of the discriminatory barriers for Black journalists to enter the profession.

But it was during the massive mobilisation against Apartheid in trade unions and local councils in the mid-eighties where Lionel gained the trust of NUJ activists. In his presidential speech the following year, in Sheffield in 1988, he welcomed representatives of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), outlining his remarkable work on behalf of the NUJ during his term. His achievements ranged from nurturing Black students entering the profession through the George Viner Memorial Fund to helping establish the Black Members' Council, which he chaired for many years and which amplified our collective voice.

If I had to choose his greatest achievement, it would be leading an NUJ solidarity delegation to the West Bank and Gaza in Palestine during the first uprising in 1987 - the first UK trade union delegation to do so.

This is the Lionel that most NUJ activists will always remember - a staunch trade unionist always ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with workers on picket lines and at demonstrations.

This he emphasised in his speech to delegates, saying: "As a Black person I felt a relief at not being patronised and expected to talk about Black issues only. I was accepted as a trade unionist in the NUJ." A few months earlier, leading an NUJ delegation to TUC Congress he spoke to a motion on Apartheid, referring to those languishing in Pretoria's jail and those in death row. But his most vibrant homage was to fellow trade unionists who, he said, "in the finest tradition of resistance, have taken on the mining companies, the big business conglomerates and the might of the South African regime."

Trade unionists and others who knew and worked with Lionel will be gathering at the end of the month at the NUJ to reminisce about the stories that make Lionel's newly published memoirs *Footprints* such a compelling reading. Speakers include his wife Liz, who co-authored the book, and his best friend during the Apartheid years, Mathatha Tsedu, as well as three NUJ presidents who knew him well and worked with him: Francis Beckett, Scarlet MacGuire and myself.

Please **book a ticket!**

Claudia Jones Lecture 2026

On 20 October the Black Members' Council will hold the annual lecture to celebrate the trailblazing journalist Claudia Jones.

This year's lecture will be hosted by the NUJ Guardian chapel and delivered by Guardian columnist Nesrine

Malik, who will examine "the Black diaspora and our right to our stories and experiences, and the value and challenge of that in a white-curated media environment in the throes of backlash against racial equity."

The Lecture will also be an

opportunity to honour the union's current George Viner Memorial Fund scholars. The union's charity aims to improve diversity and inclusion in the British and Irish media, offering bursaries to scholars to support them in their studies and career so that more Black journalists can shape the news agenda and narratives. **Space is limited so register now to reserve your place.**