

the Journalist

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In the line of fire

Reporting from war zones

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When you receive the latest edition of The Journalist, we will be looking at day 100 of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a conflict President Putin reportedly thought would last a few days.

Russia has become an isolated country and Ukraine a celebrated one.

Journalists have been at the centre of the action reporting live and far and wide via social media, making the war possibly the most intensively reported conflict so far. As we said in the last edition of the magazine, truth and reliable information are central to the battle, as they are to all wars.

In this edition we look at how journalists prepare to go into battle zones. We also have a piece on how you can recognise and treat PTSD, written by an ex-war reporter who after experiencing trauma himself went on to study psychology and became a clinical psychologist.

And in other matters: after a brief reappearance our letters page has sadly disappeared again because we received too few to fill a page for this edition. A healthy feedback section is important for a membership publication and it would be great to keep it going all the time. So, we're going to highlight topics for debate and hope that they will stimulate comments. Our first one is on page 8.

I hope to hear from you.

Christine

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Cover picture
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**Steve Bell
05**

Journalists face increasingly tough working environment

CONCERNS are growing that the working environment for journalists is becoming increasingly hostile.

The NUJ has said that new bills and reforms to existing legislation announced in the Queen's Speech mean journalists may now find themselves encountering considerably tougher obstacles during the course of their work. Government plans to proceed with reforms to existing law under the Official Secrets Acts, could see journalists prosecuted for reporting on information provided by sources, including whistle-blowers exposing wrongdoing by government.

Despite a failure by the government to formally respond to submissions



FINANCIAL TIMES

received in its summer consultation last year, it is now clear ministers plans to move ahead with little consideration for the impact on journalism.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said:

"For many this programme of legislation will feel like

open season against journalists and journalism, and against all those who value the role that human rights and media freedom plays in our democracy. The NUJ will be working hard to see off these challenges to our members and the work they do."

At the same time, the editor of the Financial Times Roula Khalaf (pictured) has called for action to stop the 'professionalised intimidation' of journalists via the UK legal system.

Giving this year's Hugh Cudlipp Lecture, Khalaf, a former foreign correspondent, called for caps on legal costs and powers for judges to halt libel claims early.

Her comments come amid

growing calls to tackle strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) – suits brought by wealthy individuals and large companies to try to silence journalists.

She also warned that journalists were 'being targeted by governments internationally. She said: "From autocracies to illiberal democracies and unfortunately even thriving democracies, journalists are maligned and manipulated, harassed and intimidated..."

"Our experience at the FT starkly illustrates the enabling nature of our system to exert pressure on public interest journalism and the threat that is ominously close to home."

inbrief...

REPORTERS BARRED FROM PATEL TRIP

The Guardian and the FT have complained that their journalists were blocked from Home Secretary Priti Patel's trip to Rwanda where she signed a controversial deal to send asylum seekers who are deemed to have arrived illegally in the UK onwards to Rwanda. Reporters from the Mirror also said they were barred from the trip.

JOURNALIST SHOT DEAD IN PAKISTAN

Zia-Ur-Rehman Farooqi, a journalist for Pakistan's 7 News, was killed by gunfire after being targeted for his reporting of land grabbing schemes. His death comes against a backdrop of reported attacks on journalists by members of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of former president Imran Khan.

MILITARY COURT JAILS REPORTER

Khalid Qaderi, a reporter for Radio Nawruz in Afghanistan was sentenced to a year in prison following his posts on social media criticising the Taliban state. In the first reported case of its kind by a military court since the Taliban gained control of the country last year, Qaderi was found guilty of conducting 'espionage for foreign media'.

Al Jazeera reporter killed

THE NUJ has condemned the killing of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli forces whilst reporting on raids in Jenin. The union has called on the authorities to act swiftly, holding those responsible to account.

A respected journalist at the news

channel for over 20 years, she was killed by a shot to her head while wearing a press vest. Another journalist with her at the time stated gunfire started without instruction to stop filming. Journalist Shatha Hanaysha, who was also present, said

the group had been deliberately targeted by the Israeli army.

Attacks against Palestinian journalists in Israel have been condemned by the NUJ and International Federation of Journalists and they believe that action must be taken by Israeli authorities to ensure the safety and protection of journalists.

NUJ builds links with Metropolitan Police

AN NUJ delegation visited the Metropolitan Police specialist training centre in Gravesend in a move to build a better working relationship between the media and the police, especially at big events. Both sides agreed the need for good communication.

During the visit, the NUJ team was told that police officers receive written direction about working with journalists, ahead of public

order events. This includes ensuring that reporting is permitted.

David Ayrton, NUJ senior organiser, said: "The NUJ has put a lot of work into building our relationship with the Met in recent years. This was a useful opportunity to better understand their operations. The Gravesend training centre is an extraordinary facility and gives a real sense of the challenges that officers face."



Reuters' Ukraine work hits record

The Reuters news agency reported record-breaking use of its photos and videos because of the war in Ukraine. The agency experienced its biggest month ever for use of its videos in March, with more than 4.5 million shows on TV. Its previous records were 3.6 million the month before, when the war began, and 3.6 million in March 2020 as the Covid pandemic started. Fifty Reuters clients collectively saw 2.84 billion video views on channels and social media of Ukraine in the first three months of 2022. In March there were about a billion social media views of Reuters content

Cambridge students win at Orwell Society's Young Journalist's Award

TWO CAMBRIDGE students took the top prizes in the Orwell Society's Young Journalist's Award this year. This is the first time the award was organised in conjunction with the NUJ, of which George Orwell was a member. The award aims to recognise the writing of promising journalism students or working journalists aged 30 or below.

The entrant deemed to have submitted the best column was University of Cambridge postgraduate Quincy Elise de Vries, for her examination of 'The cult of personality of Elon Musk'.

Runners-up in the column category were: Harry Goodwin, student journalist at the University of Cambridge, for 'New Caledonia: metal and mourning'; and Oliver Hayne, student journalist at City University, London, for 'Social Housing: a Clarion Call. Highly commended were: Hannah Quinn, a student journalist at Newcastle University, for 'Our Thought Police: Social Media'; and Ellesheva Rosa Kissin, financial news journalist, for 'How Charity Becomes Politics'.

Another Cambridge student, Meg Byrom (pictured), won the review category for her entry 'Sam Fender: the canary in the coal mine?'. Highly commended in this category were: Eva Morris, student journalist at the University of Cambridge for 'La Poupee'; and Samanta Gladkauskaitė, student journalist at Bournemouth University, for 'Space and time converge in art in Red Velvet's operatic MV for Feel My Rhythm'; and Estelle Uba, student journalist at the University of Leeds, for 'How "Squid Game" is a microcosm of capitalist society'.



The panel of judges, who included George Orwell's son, Orwell Society patron Richard Blair, agreed that the two winners were of particular note and had demonstrated how Orwell's life and works had influenced them.

Prizes totalling £4,000 were awarded in the two categories, with each winner receiving £1,500 and £500 going to each runner-up. Additionally, winners will be given free membership of the NUJ for the duration of their courses, and three years' membership of The Orwell Society.

Dr Jaron Murphy of Bournemouth University, who chaired the judging panel, said the award had "encouraged the emergence of a new generation of journalists concerned about political and cultural developments, social injustice and holding power to account in the UK and internationally".



The award encourages journalists concerned about political and cultural developments, social injustice and holding power to account

Dr Jaron Murphy
Bournemouth University

Fears over Musk's Twitter 'free speech' bid

THE INTERNATIONAL and European Federations of Journalists have condemned the planned takeover of Twitter by the Tesla billionaire Elon Musk.

They warned that this threatened pluralism and

press freedom and would create a forum for disinformation.

Musk has a long-established reputation of criticising Twitter's policies of content moderation and has regularly called on Twitter to

become a less regulated forum for free speech.

He said he planned to "make algorithms open source, defeat spam bots and authenticate all humans".

International Federations of Journalist (IFJ) surveys

have revealed how journalists, in particular women and those belonging to minority groups, have been targeted online, including on Twitter.

Anthony Bellanger, IFJ general secretary, said:

"Twitter is an extension of journalists' offices. This is where journalists promote their work, express ideas or find sources of information.

"This space must be duly moderated, while respecting freedom of speech. It is a fine balance that any Twitter owner must pay attention to."

Scan here if you care about journalism.



Journalists' Charity

Supporting journalists nationwide

Union speaks out on asylum seekers and Channel 4 at TUC black workers' conference

MOTIONS from the NUJ on asylum seekers and the privatisation of Channel 4 were passed by delegates at the TUC black workers' conference.

The government's aggressive attitude to asylum seekers contained in the Nationality and Borders Act, which became law on Thursday April 28, was condemned by the union.

It formed part of a discussion of a group of motions from unions calling on the TUC to challenge the legislation and campaign to get it repealed.

The NUJ's motion described the perilous trips across the

Channel that asylum seekers make, with many not surviving the journey.

It described the "arsenal of impossible visa requirements, reinforced controls, night vision cameras, razor wire and higher fences, and heat-detecting machines" that greeted them on arrival.

The motion outlined the appalling conditions asylum seekers were held in as their cases were being processed.

NUJ delegate Tony Adams (pictured) told the conference that the role of the media in shaping public perception on migration was vital.

"In many cases, these policies are enabled and



emboldened by racist reporting, and we have continually backed our members in fighting against alarmist reporting that dehumanises those in most need."

Parts of the media were fulfilling the government's agenda by "encouraging a culture that plays into racist stereotypes about those who desperately need our help", he said.

He recalled how former Express owner Richard Desmond had boasted that publishing racially inflammatory headlines boosted sales and profits.

The NUJ had backed members at his newspaper who called him out and refused to follow a racially biased editorial line.

Adams said: "We have long campaigned for a conscience clause – meaning journalists

cannot be disciplined by an employer for refusing to write something against the NUJ's code of conduct, which says a journalist 'produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status or sexual orientation'."

Adams also spoke on the NUJ's motion against Channel 4 privatisation. He said: "Channel 4 is a leader in diversity and inclusion, with the Black to Front project increasing black representation in front of and behind the camera."

Disability pay gap gets wider

THE PAY gap between disabled and non-disabled employees has widened to 13.8 per cent, up from 11.7 per cent in 2014, according to figures from the Office of National Statistics.

Disabled workers now earn on average £1.93 per

hour less than employees without disabilities.

Frances O'Grady, TUC general secretary, said: "Disabled workers were among the hardest hit during the pandemic, and they now face a living standards emergency – with lower pay

than non-disabled workers, but higher energy and transport costs.

"With bills and prices skyrocketing, the government must act now to help disabled workers.

"That means coming back to parliament with an

emergency budget to boost pay and universal credit and cut energy bills. Otherwise, millions of disabled workers will continue to face lower pay and in-work poverty."

The NUJ supports the TUC's call for mandatory disabled pay gap data reporting for all employers with more than 50 employees.

Such legislation should be accompanied by a duty on employers to produce targeted action plans identifying the steps they will take to address any gaps, including ensuring disabled workers with invisible impairments felt confident participating in workplace equality monitoring.

Steve Bell



White paper promises 'golden age' but will privatise Channel 4

A BROADCASTING white paper will create a 'new golden age' of British television and help public service broadcasters thrive, according to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The white paper, which paves the way for the privatisation of Channel 4, includes plans to make streaming services more accountable and be regulated in the same way as traditional broadcasting services.

The NUJ said it welcomed the measures to create a more level playing field between traditional broadcasters and streaming companies, but condemned the privatisation of Channel 4.

Paul Siegert, the union's national broadcasting officer, said: "It is time that many of the out-of-date rules around broadcasting were brought up to date.

"We welcome the news that Netflix and other streaming companies will now be regulated in the same way as traditional broadcasters. For too long, they have had an unfair advantage in the way they have operated and the rules they have had to play by. A more level playing field for all broadcasters is welcomed.

"But the issue dominating the white paper is the government's decision to privatise Channel 4. The whole industry and many in the Conservative Party recognise this is the wrong decision made at the wrong time. Channel 4 has never been healthier so why replace something that isn't broken?

"It is important if the privatisation goes ahead that there are safeguards put in place. We need cast-iron guarantees

RUSSELL HART / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



that whoever buys Channel 4 will have to commit to keeping the much-respected and award-winning one-hour nightly news programme."

Culture secretary Nadine Dorries said: "Our TV and radio industry is already the envy of the world. Today, we are giving British broadcasters the backing and support they need to rule the airwaves for years to come."

She added that the UK's TV and radio industries are "driven by exceptional talent that is delivering groundbreaking public service programming.

"Set against the backdrop of the digital transformation of our viewing habits, today's plans will revamp decades-old laws to help our public service broadcasters compete in the internet age."



Channel 4 has never been healthier so why replace something that isn't broken?

Paul Siegert
NUJ national
broadcasting officer

Herald features staff jobs saved

SIX staff positions at Scottish newspaper The Herald, which is owned by Newsquest, have been saved after the NUJ threatened industrial action.

The six staff at risk in the features department were informed of the change of

heart in an email from Graham Morrison, managing director of the Glasgow-based titles.

The reversal was prompted by the NUJ chapel's decision to ballot for industrial action after demonstrating overwhelming support for

this in an initial indicative ballot.

The company will hold discussions with the features writers in regard to current vacancies.

John Toner, NUJ national organiser for Scotland said: "We are delighted that

Newsquest has listened to the NUJ chapel and that these six highly respected writers are no longer facing redundancy.

"We now look forward to talks with the company about how our members' undoubted skills can be deployed. As a result of this decision, we have called off

our ballot for industrial action."

"It is important to emphasise the principled stand taken by our members, who were and remain unquestionably committed to resist compulsory redundancies if and when necessary. The NUJ has reason to be proud of them."

Call to address high FOI rejection rate

MORE than 100 newspaper editors, MPs, journalists, celebrities and campaigners have signed a letter calling on John Edwards, the Information Commissioner, to make freedom of information more open.

The letter, coordinated by openDemocracy, highlighted growing concern about how freedom of information was working in Britain.

An analysis showed 2020 to be the worst year on record for freedom of information in the UK, with just 41 per cent of requests made to central government granted in full.

The letter to Edwards, who became information commissioner in January this year, says the "current regulatory approach to FOI is clearly not working". It urges him to do more to keep the government accountable.

Signatories include the editor of The Guardian, Katharine Viner, the Observer's editor Paul Webster, senior Tory MP David Davis, the Green Party's Caroline Lucas, shadow solicitor general Andy Slaughter and NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet – along with a string of journalists, experts and campaign groups.



Snoopers' charter legal challenge wins right to go to appeal court

THE UNION has welcomed a high court decision granting an appeal against a judgement allowing the mass surveillance of electronic devices by the security services.

'Liberty, the organisation granted leave to appeal, was supported by the NUJ which employed its own legal team in the case which emphasised the potential impact on journalism.

'In its initial judgement in July 2019, the court said the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) of 2016, which allowed 'bulk' surveillance, did not breach the rights of free expression. It decided there were sufficient safeguards for journalistic communication.

However the 2016 legislation has since been dubbed a 'snoopers' charter', raising fears about how private communications and individuals' personal data can be stored and used by intelligence agencies. Liberty claimed the powers of "bulk hacking" were unlawfully wide.

Vindicating the NUJ's arguments regarding the incompatibility

of the IPA with article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the government has said it intends to change the law so a judge has to give permission before intelligence services can intercept confidential material held by journalists.

While this is an important step forward, the NUJ still hopes to play a significant role in these proceedings and continues to support Liberty's appeal.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said: "This is a brilliant victory

for the NUJ over a principle that cuts to the core of journalistic practice. The inadequate safeguards to protect journalistic communications were of enormous concern and, left unchallenged, could have led to the interception of communications between journalists and their sources.

"The duty to protect sources and maintain a pledge of confidentiality is a vital one that the NUJ and its members will always stand up and defend." The NUJ's lawyers said: "The protection of journalistic sources is one of the basic conditions for freedom of expression in a functioning democracy."

LIBERTY

inbrief...

MASON BECOMES BBC POLITICAL EDITOR

Chris Mason has become the BBC's political editor, taking over from Laura Kuenssberg. He has been a BBC political correspondent 10 years and a broadcast reporter for 20 years. He has also presented BBC Radio 4's Any Questions? since 2019, which he will continue doing until the summer.

WOODING IS SUNDAY EXPRESS EDITOR

David Wooding has become the new editor of the Sunday Express. Wooding, an NUJ member, moves from being assistant editor (politics) at The Sun and was political editor of The Sun on Sunday. He succeeds Mick Brooker, who has moved to GB News as editorial director.

FAST GROWTH AT NATIONAL WORLD

The National World news website has become JPI Media's most popular a year after its launch, overtaking The Scotsman. National World has gone from 3.5 million page views per month in April 2021 to almost 20 million, according to Google Analytics. In February, it was the fourth fastest-growing news brand in the UK, after only the New York Times, Reuters News and Tom's Guide, which reviews new tech products.

Database bug disrupts print delivery

APOLOGIES to hundreds of members who asked for a print copy of The Journalist but haven't received one. As many as 700 members may have been affected.

The NUJ's website

developers said the problem was caused by a bug that sometimes prevented the choice of print from being recorded on the database but this has been resolved.

The first print edition in

February/March was also frustrated by some data being unreadable at the mailing house.

If you want a print copy, please change your preferences in MyNUJ on the

website or email journalist@nuj.org.uk. You need to do this even if you received a print copy previously.

Please also contact us if you have problems, which we hope you won't.

Vigil for Lyra McKee on third anniversary



NUJ'S Belfast and district branch have unveiled a banner to mark the third anniversary of journalist Lyra McKee's death. On April 18, friends and colleagues gathered at St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast to hold a vigil celebrating the life and legacy of the 29-year-old who was murdered while covering a disturbance in Derry.



Time Out ends print issue after 54 years

Time Out is ending its London print edition after 54 years, 18 months after it returned to the streets following the first lockdown. The publisher is yet to confirm the scale of any job losses, but said it was consulting with staff. The company, which operates in 59 countries, began as a one-page pamphlet in 1968. It said it was moving to a digital-first model, which would focus on its digital channels, live events and its branded markets. Its final print edition will be published at the end of June.

Should the NUJ scrap established terminology? **Natasha Hirst** reports

2008 GETTY IMAGES



Outdated terms or treasured traditions?

The inner workings and structures of the NUJ can be baffling to new members, especially so for younger workers with limited knowledge of the role of trade unions. The jargon of chapels certainly turns heads.

Disabled members' council broadcasting rep Johny Cassidy said: "When I first got involved with the NUJ and heard people talking about mothers and fathers of chapels, I had no idea what I'd got myself involved with. I started worrying it was some sort of Freemason-type cult."

The term 'chapel' originally referred to the voluntary association of staff in a printing workshop which was subsequently adopted by the NUJ. Whereas women were excluded from printing unions until the early 1900s, our union can be proud of accepting women and men equally from its establishment in 1907.

The earliest references to chapels date back to 1683 in Joseph Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing*, although the precise

origins of the term are unclear.

"I've no idea if the stories about monks running printing presses and organising against the church for better terms and conditions are true or not, but I kind of like it," Cassidy says.

"It's a great tale and a fantastic way to illustrate trade unionism. It might feel a bit exclusionary to new joiners but it makes the point really well about the need to stand together. Long may it last."

As industry and workplaces change, we face new challenges in recruiting and developing new activists. There are fewer opportunities for reps to educate members about our customs and values and encourage engagement.

Clearly many activists are keen to hold on to the terminology, but others assert that it's ageist, outdated and unacceptably gender-specific. The gendered nature of the terms is increasingly being questioned. Using 'parent of chapel' doesn't quite get around it.

Father of chapel representing a majority black and minority ethnic members described his embarrassment at introducing himself

in this way. "I am one of the youngest members of the team. If, like me, you were born and raised outside of the UK, you would have found the terms mother/father of chapel confusing and odd. Why does a trade union at a workplace need a 'chapel' and why should it have a parent? Our members are neither our children nor our followers."

When Rob Osborne introduced himself as the father of the chapel at ITV Cymru Wales, he was met by blank looks. His first task in his new role was to change his title to chair. He's not alone in doing so informally but there is no provision in the NUJ rule book for this.

He says: "This union needs to attract new members. There are all sorts of ways we can do it, but let us make life easy for them. Some will be reluctant to join, unsure what a union is for or fear consequences to membership. Simple changes of terminology can help – it makes it more accessible. Then there are also changes in using pronouns. Do we really want to make any member feel uncomfortable by using the FoC or MoC title? I don't think so."

Historically, our exclusivity as a specialist union gave us the power and legitimacy to protect journalism and fight for members' rights. Diversity is now necessary to sustain our union. Without inclusion, it is meaningless. Building a strong sense of belonging and solidarity with the NUJ requires us to connect with other aspects of identity that are important to members and through different platforms.

As a union of storytellers, how can we be more effective in communicating the heritage and traditions of the NUJ and encourage innovation to adapt to our changing industry?

As Osborne concludes, "I appreciate the historic precedent and links to the past. Let's celebrate those, but let us also focus on the future and appealing to the next generation."

Natasha Hirst is vice president of the NUJ and chair of the equality council

What do you think? Please send your thoughts to journalist@nuj.org.uk for the letters pages

Sir Keir and the case of the media witchhunt



The 'beergate' scandal will turn into froth, says **Raymond Snoddy**

Making predictions about the future is a hazardous business, particularly when politicians, police investigations and lockdown regulations are involved.

But here goes. I predict that Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer will be cleared of any wrongdoing in the great beergate scandal covered so relentlessly day after day by the Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday.

The attack was so successful that the BBC and other news organisations were forced to follow despite the existence of many more important stories, not least the cost of living crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

You can see why news editors had to react in the interests of balance and fairness even though there was no remote equivalence between a beer and a curry at the end of a day's campaigning in Durham Miners Hall and endless bring-your-own booze and birthday parties in Downing Street.

Sir Keir, who took the brave and principled decision that he would resign if he were to be given a fixed penalty notice by Durham police for a breach of lockdown rules, is almost certainly safe for two reasons.

The first is that it looks as if the evidence will not stack up against Sir Keir. The main allegation by the Mail through a leaked timetable is that at, the end of the working day, there was in effect a beer and curry party and that no further work was done.

According to The Guardian, the Labour group will be able to prove from timed messages that work did resume after a meal break and continued until 1am. So, no party.

The real reason why Sir Keir is likely to survive the concentrated onslaught of the full forces of the Daily Mail is simply who he is. A lawyer and former director of public prosecutions known for a history of obeying the spirit and the letter of rules is unlikely to have been foolish enough to have been casual with lockdown regulations.

If so, what follows next?

The Daily Mail will be very angry indeed that they will have failed to bring down a Labour leader and potential prime minister although, naturally, they will blame him for putting disgraceful pressure on Durham police by warning in advance that he would resign if found guilty.

There are a number of leitmotifs running through this operatic tale. It turns out that the pictures of Sir Keir were taken by then student Ivo Delingpole, son of right-wing journalist James Delingpole and, because of the setting of the Miners Hall, the picture-taking may have involved trespass.

The leak of documents could also have come from Labour elements who did not wish their leader well. Then, according to Private Eye, Mail hacks enjoyed a beer or two themselves during lockdown. Will the paper push for a retrospective investigation?

Interestingly, the word from inside the higher echelons of Daily Mail towers is that they were never trying to bring Sir Keir down because they fancy Johnson's chances against him in a general election campaign.

Apparently, they merely wanted to highlight ridiculous lockdown rules and what they saw as the Labour leader's hypocrisy for calling for Boris Johnson's resignation before he had been found guilty by the Metropolitan police. Make of that what you will.

But if the Daily Mail, which single-handedly forced the reopening of the police case against the Labour leader, fails in its attempt, they will have done their man BoJo no favours.

If Sir Keir, who promised to resign, is cleared while prime minister Johnson, who was indeed fined for breaking the law, stubbornly refuses to go, the contrast between the two men will be eloquent indeed.

In the unlikely event of a fixed penalty notice for the Labour leader, it would be a personal tragedy, but it would also expose Johnson even more – an honourable man compared with the exact opposite and strengthen a new Labour leader, probably a woman.

If one prediction is hazardous, to make two in one article is downright foolhardy.

But here goes. On top of beergate turning into froth, Boris Johnson will be gone by the autumn, brought down by a toxic mixture of partygate and a complete unwillingness or inability to do anything about the cost-of-living crisis. What will the Daily Mail and The Sun say then?

If the bold second prediction should turn out to be correct – or at least correct before the next election – then the position of the main right-wing papers from the Daily Mail and the Sun to the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Express is going to be tricky indeed.

They have invested a great deal of credibility in backing the myth of Boris Johnson the great leader who could win elections, get Brexit done and got all the big decisions (including the handling of the Covid crisis) right despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Then it will be time for the biggest Kelvin Mackenzie reverse ferret in the recent history of journalism.

“The word is that the Daily Mail were never trying to bring Sir Keir down because they fancied Johnson's chances against him in a general election”

On the front line

Josiah Mortimer looks at the changing face of the battlefield for war correspondents



Let's take a scenario. You hear gunshots nearby. Most of us would get the hell out. But in every major media organisation is a hardcore of reporters who actively run towards danger.

War-zone freelance Mathew Charles has gone through extreme training including staged kidnapping and execution. Each year, hundreds of UK journalists are put through hostile environment training to prepare them for venturing into places most of us would run a mile from. And for war-zone training providers right now, business is – sadly – booming.

"We've definitely seen an uptick in demand recently. We're about to start a course in Lviv [in western Ukraine]," says ex-British Army man Stephen Smith, who runs high-risk training group SEPAR International. Shortly after the invasion, news organisations began asking for training on the ground, so journalists could put those skills to use immediately. Reuters tells me they are putting 600-700 journalists through hostile environment training every year.

When we speak, Smith is back in the UK, fresh from a stint in Ukraine's bomb-struck second city, Kharkiv. His main focus now is preparing journalists for worst-case scenarios: being targeted, shot, kidnapped and worse.

For war reporters, worst-case scenarios are all too common. Charles, who freelances for the Telegraph and the BBC, has spent more than a decade in some of the world's most volatile environments and tyrannies, and has witnessed South American assassinations and been detained by Belarus' secret services. In five years of reporting from Colombia's capital Bogotá, he has covered killings by guerilla group FARC, drug conspiracies and state violence.

Getting there

Getting into a conflict zone in the first place can be difficult. As a freelance, Charles had to sort out his own entry logistics. A recent law caused headaches. "Colombian migration authorities were denying visas to journalists – and some were deported – because they didn't have qualifications. I had my PhD so I was quite lucky," he laughs. After a press freedom row, the government backed down and repealed the law.

Martin Patience, a foreign correspondent for the BBC for 16 years, tells me the difference between working in a war zone as a freelance versus a staffer is 'night and day': "In most bureaus, there'll be an office manager – helping with visas, tax and with local producers, sorting transportation and so on. The BBC expects you to get cracking straight away. And it's

always the BBC you go to for support or other colleagues." He feels lucky to have worked for an outlet in conflicts as dangerous as Gaza, Lebanon and Afghanistan that looks after its foreign correspondents.

An international press card via the NUJ or being on the Frontline Club's freelance register are passports to local support. "If something goes wrong, they'll get you out of the field or liaise with organisations to arrange medivacs [medical evacuations]," Charles says. Agencies such as Reuters have teams who work with security specialists, advisers, local sources and staff to assess conditions and coordinate support for journalists. For freelances, cross-border bodies including the International

Support for data and physical safety

THE START of the Ukraine war saw press freedom organisations kick into gear.

Netherlands-based NGO Free Press Unlimited launched Media Lifeline Ukraine which, by mid-April, had got 225 Ukrainian and pro-democracy Russian journalists to a safe place.

They also got 150 high-quality bulletproof vests and helmets across the Ukraine border for the 'direct protection' of journalists reporting at the front lines.

Crucially, the fund takes on Putin's information war too, by providing war correspondents with the resources and support to set up virtual private networks – internet connections that cannot be spied on by Putin's forces – and protection against hacking.

The NUJ has been working closely with the International Federation of Journalists and Ukrainian journalists' unions such as the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine to build a safety fund, with all donations being used directly to provide emergency assistance to support journalists under threat.

That money is buying protective and communications equipment for reporters and film teams and used to set up advice hotlines. You can donate here: tinyurl.com/warcorr.

The NUJ has also launched Storysmart, a tool on its website, which provides practical advice for those preparing to work in hostile and conflict environments.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said the union was stepping up its calls to "all employers and engagers" to ensure staff and freelance journalists reporting across Ukraine had the safety equipment and support they needed.

Kit has surged in cost in recent months. Journalists cannot wear camouflage safety gear – instead, they must wear the less-common black or navy blue kit.

The Rory Peck Trust's Clothilde Redfern tells me there is a "Europe-wide shortage" of supply. But partnering with Reporters Sans Frontières has meant press freedom organisations have been able to pool their purchasing power and get visors, flak jackets and more to the frontline.

**RORY
PECK
TRUST**

Federation of Journalists can help secure training and kit.

In 2019, the Frontline Club launched an international press card to help freelancers navigate checkpoints and give them access to “a community” on foreign assignments, Charles says.

Another lifeline is the Rory Peck Trust, part of Journalists in Distress (JiD). Charles is one of many to have used the its grants to fund safety training. Journalists in Ukraine are being kitted with body armour through trust and JiD funding.

For Patience, getting kit was never an issue at the BBC: “Flak jackets are prioritised. You’re never allowed into the country without it.” Field producers or ‘fixers’ have found support hard to get, prompting the Ethical Journalism Network and 200 media organisations to launch the Perugia Declaration for Ukraine, with commitments to give them the “same rights, respect, support, social security and credit as all journalists.”

Online reporting risks

Online reporting has added new risks. “How do you protect your source both physically and digitally? That source may not know their device could get them into trouble,” Smith says. Many courses cover protecting data from snooping governments.

“When you log off, you need to disconnect the hard drive, store it safely, take your laptop home, clear the whiteboards and burn your notes. And you have to do that every day,” he tells me.

Clothilde Redfern, director of the Rory Peck Trust, says there are now “digital, legal and psychological risks” as well as physical safety concerns. The issues of trauma and mental health support for war correspondents are now recognised. “It



**For war reporters,
worst-case
scenarios - being
targeted, shot,
kidnapped and
worse - are all
too common**



was paid lip service to 10 years ago. Now it’s huge,” Smith says.

There is also the legal front line. Investigative reporter Catherine Belton, after writing about Vladimir Putin, faced a barrage of libel actions brought by multiple Russian billionaires and state-controlled oil company Rosneft. Strategic lawsuits against public participation are increasingly being “used to take journalists to court and shut them up”, Redfern says.

And for female journalists, the threats multiply. “I’ve lost count of the times I’ve been followed by men as I walk alone while on assignment or spoken to other female reporters about the harassment and sexism on the front line,” Reuters’ Rossalyn Warren told GQ recently, following stints in China and Rwanda.

For lone freelancers, it is especially dangerous. The NUJ, the Rory Peck Trust and journalists I spoke to were clear that inexperienced freelancers should not head out to Ukraine.

In Ukraine, journalists have been targeted as ‘combatants’. “Ten to 15 years ago, having ‘press’ on your flak jacket may have awarded you respect or protection. It’s now a target on your back,” says Redfern.

Yet, between the bombs, “journalists always find a way to support each other over a beer or two,” Charles says. Patience’s former colleagues find rare hours of eerie peace – or gossip – in the coffee shops. His time in Afghanistan taught him that wherever journalists go “there’s a real spirit of camaraderie”.

By the start of May, at least seven media workers have been killed since Russia’s invasion began. It takes a unique kind of person to head into the firepit. When this war ends, those left will head into danger elsewhere. Many will be scarred. “If you walk in and it doesn’t change you, something’s wrong. It takes its toll,” Patience says. Support for those journalists must never end.

A journalist interviews Fiodor Vanislavsky, a Ukrainian government minister, in the village of Horenka, north of Kyiv

EDDIE GERALD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Journalists are at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, but it can be treated, says psychologist and ex-war reporter **Dr Martyn Bignold**

From trauma to recovery

Coverage of the war in Ukraine will mean more journalists are directly exposed to trauma, and many more indirectly exposed as video and images are examined in newsrooms around the world.

One consequence will be an increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and, while our understanding of PTSD has improved enormously in the past 20 years, many obstacles to identifying, diagnosing and treating it remain.

Trauma in this context means witnessing a sudden, frightening, life-changing event. Many people will experience trauma if they are unlucky enough to be involved in a road accident, a house fire or are physically attacked. The psychological impact can be profound and long lasting for some while, for others, recovery appears spontaneous.

The consequences of exposure to trauma may be anxiety, grief, anger or depression but, in a few, it may be PTSD. It is not clear why some develop PTSD and others do not when exposed to the same trauma. Most demographic factors have been largely discounted; age, race, personality type and sex appear to be insignificant.

What is not PTSD

Imagine a road accident in which a coach with a dozen passengers careers off the road and crashes into a ditch. There are some injuries but no fatalities and the emergency services soon arrive.

A week later, many of those involved might report they are not sleeping as well since the crash. Some may notice they are a bit nervous or wound up and spend time thinking about what happened.

At that point, none could be diagnosed with PTSD. Their response is a common, functional reaction to a frightening incident. This is recognised in National Institute for Health and Care



It is not clear why some develop PTSD and others do not when exposed to the same trauma



Excellence guidelines, which recommend a period of watchful waiting after exposure to trauma.

But three months later, while many of those involved only think about the accident occasionally, one of those passengers has not had a full night's sleep since. That person is no longer driving their own car as they cannot tolerate the smell of petrol when they fill up. They are going out less as they find crowded, noisy places quite aversive. They are staying in more often and drinking more alcohol than they used to. That's the person who needs assessment for PTSD.

Mechanism of PTSD

PTSD can be thought of as a memory processing disorder. When we are under extreme physical threat, our mind prioritises only functions that will enhance our chances of survival. Physically and mentally, our fight-flight complex does everything to prepare for escaping or defeating the threat, so it turns off any faculties that do not contribute to our immediate survival.



One part that is downregulated is the hippocampus, which is the part of the brain involved in memory processing. Normally, the hippocampus 'files' our biographical memories away in chronological order, then retrieves and updates them when new information becomes available. As it is effectively turned off during a traumatic incident, that experience is not 'date-stamped' and cannot be updated.

Then, if the memory is triggered, it does not feel like a memory but like a contemporary event. And no amount of new information ("But you did survive") will change the feelings of dread, anger, guilt or fear that are re-triggered. Reliving the emotional impact of the event quickly becomes unsustainable so the brain tries to avoid anything that might trigger it. Such as the smell of petrol. That cycle of reliving, hypervigilance and avoidance defines PTSD.

The vast majority of those exposed to trauma will not develop PTSD. Two factors appear to influence vulnerability to it: previous exposure and the 'meaning' that is made of the incident. So there are higher rates of PTSD among groups with higher exposure such as the armed forces, blue-light services and those who witness disaster and unrest such as journalists.

This meaning made of the event includes whether it was experienced alone or in a group, whether it was caused by other humans or natural forces and whether you had time to process it afterwards or found it intolerable and tried to suppress it with alcohol or distraction.

The diagnostic criteria for PTSD once specified that the traumatic stressor must be an event 'outside normal human experience'. That could also serve as a definition of 'newsworthy' so, for those in the news industry, getting close to trauma may be part of their job. As Robert Capa, a founder of Magnum Photos, said: "If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough."

Some journalists may also risk violence as part of their revealing what some may prefer to remain unknown, or risk secondary exposure by interviewing victims or deciding which of the many graphic images available best illustrates a story.

Freelance journalists have an increased vulnerability. Working alone increases your susceptibility to developing PTSD as you lose the protective nature of being alongside someone with similar values and experiences, which exacerbates the sense of isolation that often haunts those who have witnessed shocking, life-changing events.

Having time to process the experience is also protective. A period of decompression allows adjustment from the high-stress environment of a war zone to the different stresses of life at home.

Not that you need to travel to be exposed to trauma. For Ukrainian journalists, covering the war might feel like working from home so protective boundaries are almost absent. Domestic reporters and photographers may be called to traumatic events such as the Manchester bombing.

Journalists are exposed to the risk of secondary exposure as they often witness the effects of trauma when, for example, interviewing victims, reporting on court cases or viewing images that are too shocking to appear in the public domain.

When to get help

The following may signal the development of PTSD:

- Disturbed sleep (especially if you wake distressed, shout or thrash around in your sleep), which suggests you may be re-living the trauma in your sleep).

A brush with trauma led to career change

AFTER 20 years in journalism, I spent seven years retraining in psychology. While it may look a considered transition, in hindsight it was most likely a product of our innate motivation to create a narrative for our lives that is only loosely objective. As I now know.

I can trace my interest in psychology back to childhood curiosity (my name spelling meant I was often known as Martyn with a 'Why?') but, leaving school in the 1970s, a career in psychology wasn't considered or even available.

Instead, that interest in people and my thirst for exploration took me via the NCTJ to local newspapers then to nationals, magazines and TV. I moved from Slough to Amsterdam and on to Hong Kong.

Then, on assignment in Sarajevo during the siege, I was struck by the wide range of responses among my colleagues to what I know now to be exposure to trauma. Some were unaffected. A lot were drinking heavily. In one case, a childhood stutter re-emerged. It was a puzzle.

Then, in 1998, I had a brush with trauma myself. I was reporting on the Kosovo war from the Albanian border when the car I was in



ran off the road. Back in the UK, I found I had a fractured vertebra and was off work for several weeks.

Once my physical health returned, I was aware of changes in my behaviour. My risk tolerance was diminished. Situations that had excited me now un-nerved me.

Before the accident, I had a motorbike and I'd got my private pilot's licence but now I felt uneasy just walking down the street. Over time, that uneasiness subsided but I needed to understand what had happened.

A few years later, I could no longer see my future in an industry that was going through tectonic changes and, in 2002, took redundancy and began a psychology degree.

My plan was to return as a more psychologically aware journalist but I enjoyed the subject more than I expected. It provided a few answers to the puzzles I had observed in

myself and others. Better still, it asked even more challenging questions.

So, I spent a year as an assistant psychologist in a London hospital then started doctoral training when real learning began. Until then, it had been fascinating but theoretical.

There were challenges to retraining, such as losing the career status from 20 years in news, but I enjoyed learning and found trauma response particularly fascinating.

After qualifying, I spent four years in a GP surgery, then joined a service offering treatment for PTSD to British Armed Forces veterans.

One thing that sustains my work with PTSD is that it is fairly well understood – certainly compared to depression or psychosis – so therapy can be effective and that gives me a real sense of achievement. And it keeps on asking really good questions.

• Emotional outbursts. Many people are left emotionally numb after witnessing trauma but the fight-flight reflex can surface in outbursts of anger or fear.

• Behavioural changes such as going out less, increased use of alcohol or drugs – they are all patterns of avoidance.

• Cognitive changes such as developing a persistent negative view of yourself, your future or the world.

If you recognise those symptoms, Mind or your NHS trust websites will indicate local services. Or go to your GP. Every NHS trust has a team of psychologists and psychiatrists who specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD.

All images: Craig Sugden

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Value of older workers ignored

Age is seen as the poor relation when it comes to equality at work, says **Jenny Sims**



Karen Ross, professor of gender and media at Newcastle University, is carrying out research for a book on gender, age and the media and is seeking interviews with NUJ members.

She says: "The chapter I'm writing right now looks at women media professionals and their experiences in different parts of the media industry. A key part of the book will deal with the experiences of women media professionals in various parts of the industry and in particular with the disproportionate age discrimination they suffer."

Successful pay discrimination cases brought by high-profile BBC journalists Carrie Gracie, its China correspondent, and news presenter Samira Ahmed brought widespread publicity to gender pay discrimination.

Gracie won her case and was awarded £361,000 back pay (which she donated to the Equal Pay Advice Service) and the BBC agreed to pay her the same as male presenters.

In Ahmed's case, the London Central Employment Tribunal unanimously found in her favour. A settlement was reached with the BBC but no figure was made public.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission consequently conducted an investigation and produced a report. Though it cleared the BBC of discrimination, it identified areas where the corporation could make improvements and increase transparency around decision-making and communications.

But successful age discrimination cases are another matter and hard to find – as yet. The compulsory retirement case of former RTE producer Anne Roper, who won a €100,000 settlement, from her employers is an exception.

Roper, 65, wanted to work for another year. RTE refused, so she took her case to the Workplace Relations Commission and won. The commission found that forcing Roper to retire at the age of 65 in line with RTE's compulsory retirement age was discriminatory on grounds of age and contrary to the Employment Equalities Act. RTE appealed against the decision to the Labour Court – and lost.

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary and Irish Executive Council chair, who was a support witness for Roper

at the Labour Court, explains some of the background.

"In Ireland, there is a code of practice on extending working life published by the Workplace Relations Commission. An employer may require employees to retire but it cannot be based on age alone. Each case must be considered on its own basis – and the Roper case does not mean that all workers have a right to work indefinitely.

"If someone wishes to work beyond the normal retirement age in a contract, they can apply, and it is in the event of refusal that we [the NUJ] tend to get involved. There's not an absolute right to work for as long as you wish or to remain in position for an age of your choosing. The employer must justify its policy on the basis of organisational need, intergenerational fairness etc, in line with the code."

The RTE, which has reaffirmed its policy that 65 is its normal retirement age, failed to do that in Roper's case. Roper was reported to be happy with the outcome, having won an amount that covered the year's salary she said she needed for her planned retirement at 66.

It's 12 years since the Equality Act was passed in the UK, introducing legislation to protect people from discrimination based on nine personal characteristics: age, race, sex, gender reassignment, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

Many believe age is still the poor relation of the protected characteristics listed in the act and that greater awareness of rights is still needed. Then, perhaps, more older journalists who do experience ageism might be less reluctant to put their heads above the parapet and challenge companies' policies.

In the UK, one in 10 people in work is aged over 65 and half of all adults will be over 50 by 2030.

An Age at Work online conference to help businesses and governments put age inclusion on their agendas was recently organised by Business in the Community for three nations – Ireland, Wales and Scotland – and attended by government representatives, employers and individuals.

Speakers agreed government and business policies were needed to help older people to stay in or return to work. They also agreed the key to success was 'flexibility' – allowing people to work from home or office, varied working hours,

50%

Half of all adults
in the UK will be
over 50 by 2030



and carers' breaks for those looking after older relatives. And there is clearly an appetite for such measures. 'Flexiwork' is apparently the most used search word on the internet by job seekers.

In Scotland, where one in three of the workforce is aged over 50, research by the University of Edinburgh Business School into reducing barriers to employment for over-50s resulted in the development of an Age Inclusive Matrix.

It is a tool to support and enable organisations to be as age-inclusive as possible, it takes into account people's needs and circumstances.

Professor Wendy Loretto, dean of the University of Edinburgh and a co-designer of the matrix, told the conference she was pleased to report it was now being widely used by Scottish organisations.

It was helping to overcome the barriers for older workers such as only offering short-term contracts to people aged 60 or over and failure to allow flexible hours or working from home.

"It has put ageism on the agenda for employers," she said.

Conference host Wendy Austin, a former BBC Northern Ireland broadcaster and journalist, said: "It's important we get the chance to work as long as we want."

Dr Martin Hyde, associate professor of gerontology at Swansea University, said age-inclusive policies were important to

enable people to have the chance of a second career. A range of speakers from business and community organisations agreed that planning for an older workforce and helping older people stay in work longer was not only beneficial to them but also made good business sense. This could include offering people mid-career reviews and training.

One speaker said: "Tackling ageism now is like tackling gender in the 70s." If that is true, there is a long road ahead.

Ruby Wax, American-British actress, comedian, TV personality, author and mental health campaigner, was a keynote motivational speaker.

Asked her age, she refused to answer. "I don't tell anyone my age – I don't like to be put in a box," she said. (Wikipedia spoiler: she's 69 and was born on 19 April 1953 in Illinois.)

Wax reinvented herself in her 50s as an author and mindfulness campaigner after gaining a master's degree in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy from the University of Oxford. In 2015, she was awarded an OBE for her services to mental health.

Her takeaway tips for older workers included: "Don't talk about yourself as an older person. Stay curious." And for employers: "Give older workers some responsibility for helping nurture younger people."

Sharing some union insights on ageism in the workplace, Natasha Hirst, NUJ vice-president and chair of the union's equality council, said: "As companies chase their profit margins, we've seen many older and experienced journalists lose their jobs."

"Trainees and new starters lose out by not having this experience to draw on to support them. It's a loss for those leaving and entering the profession and for journalism itself."

Meanwhile Ross offers anonymity to any journalist willing to be interviewed for her book. Contact her at Karen.ross@newcastle.ac.uk

Work for later life

THE TUC is calling for a mid-life career and skills review for all workers to help them plan, progress and prosper in later life. This includes expanding skills and establishing a new 'right to retrain'.

Its recent report, *Older Workers after the Pandemic: Creating an Inclusive Labour Market*, also recommends a range of actions to enable more flexible working.

These include making flexible working a stronger legal right and promoting flexibility in all jobs.

"Every job can be worked flexibly,"

it claims. "Employers should think upfront about the flexible working options that are available in a role, publish these in all job adverts, and give successful applicants a day-one right to choose those options."

Plans to tackle labour shortages by helping more older people stay in work must address the long-running structural inequalities that result in those on lower pay and black and minority ethnic workers being pushed out of work for health reasons, it says.

Since the start of the pandemic, 200,000 workers aged 50-65 have left the

labour market, 97,000 of them because of sickness or ill health.

Consequently, one of the report's key recommendations is earlier access to state pensions.

It says: "Those approaching state pension age who are unlikely to be able to work again due to caring responsibilities, ill-health or long-term unemployment should be eligible for early access to their state pension."

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady (pictured) called on the government to urgently review its plans to raise the pension age.

Download the report from: <https://tinyurl.com/3b6nkm88>



JESS HURD

Gay News fell foul of an antiquated blasphemy offence, reports **Jonathan Sale**

RELIGIOUS CONVICTION

Gay News features editor Keith Howes had decidedly negative views about a poem sent in on spec. It was, he said, “sentimental, sadomasochistic slop”. The offending text was entitled *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name*, which described a gay Christ who had a more than brotherly affection for His disciples.

Even more daring were some thoughts about the large size of His holy organ (not the musical sort found in a church). And then there was the matter of the wounds in His dead body being penetrated by a Roman centurion in an amatory rather than medical way. (As Monty Python’s *Life of Brian* might have put it: “And what else have the Romans ever done for us?” No, don’t answer that...).

However, the features editor could not express this criticism at the crucial point when the contribution from respected poet and professor James Kirkup came in; he was away from the fortnightly paper’s office researching a series of articles.

Gay News editor Denis Lemon (pictured right) did not have confidence in his own literary judgment, so he went down the corridor for a second opinion (effectively a first opinion). He consulted Rictor Norton, who was clearly the fortnightly paper’s key researcher, writer, subeditor, typesetter and multitasker for everything short of putting the cat out at night.

In Norton’s own account: “Even though I never played a direct role in the Gay News blasphemy trial, the blame for publishing *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name* in the issue of 3-16 June 1976 probably rests squarely on my shoulders.”

Modestly, he added that Lemon relied on him more for his typesetting than his literary skills but: “He valued my opinion because I had published a book on the history of gay literature and had a PhD.” Having read it, Norton reported

that the poem appeared to be sincere and serious rather than deliberately provocative: “Although in many ways shocking, it was not pornographic.”

Lemon put *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name* into the paper, prepared to face the wrath of any gay Christian readers, the ‘Jesus queens’.

Letters from the wrathful readership poured in: “We realised we had given great offence. We had stepped too far against the boundary of good taste.”

An apology might have quietened everything down but someone – unlikely to have been one of the 20,000 regular subscribers – stirred things up by slipping a copy through the letterbox of Mary Whitehouse, the scourge of

the Permissive Society. Her response was to launch in December a private prosecution against Lemon for ‘blasphemous libel’.

On the bright side, the death penalty for blasphemy had been abolished in 1676, exactly three centuries earlier.

The last person imprisoned for blasphemy was a John William Gott in 1921 for publishing pamphlets entitled *Rib Ticklers* and *God and Gott*. Nobody died, one could say. Except they did. Suffering from an incurable illness, Gott was finished off by his sentence of nine months of hard labour.

It was reassuring that Lord Denning had declared – prematurely, as it turned out – in 1949: “The offence of blasphemy is a dead letter.”

Literary figure and expert mum

“MY ROLE was to look respectable and be literary,” recalls Margaret Drabble, who found herself one of the star witnesses for the defence at the Gay News blasphemy trial.

The novelist who nailed down the zeitgeist wasn’t yet Dame Margaret Holroyd, which would have been even more respectable. It was as a mother that she attracted the judge’s quizzical attention.

There was an echo of the prosecution barrister in the *Lady Chatterley* trial who asked members of the jury if they would allow their servants to read this sort of obscenity.

Justice King-Hamilton demanded to know if Drabble would possibly allow her 16-year-old son to see the allegedly blasphemous

poem that was under discussion.

She retorted that she had already shown it to the lad: “It certainly didn’t ruin his life.”

This did not go down well.

She had also been a witness at a previous prosecution – that of Paul Ableman, author of *The Mouth and Oral Sex*. “That was a much more entertaining trial – we won!” she said.

The Gay News case, over the publication of *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name*, was more distressing.

She was an admirer of poet James Kirkup and had one of his better poems on her bedroom wall.

“I got very upset at anyone being sent to prison on such a ridiculous, trumped-up charge,” she said.

“A prosecution for blasphemy wouldn’t happen now: there are so few Christians left – devout, dedicated, pig-headed, militant or otherwise.”



1977 POPPERFOTO

Looking
back to:
.....
1976

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

However, lawyers for Whitehouse, supremo of the National Viewers and Listeners' Association, managed to dig up the corpse of some dusty legislation and apply it to Kirkup's hateful lines.

At the start of the trial on July 4 1977, with Lemon and Gay News in the dock, the far from radical Judge Alan King-Hamilton considered the poem so dangerous that it was distributed only to the jury and journalists; he ordered that it could go no further. (It had, of course, been published a year earlier.)

On the plus side, the defence team could boast Geoffrey Robertson, then as now a go-to guy for radical causes. As a junior barrister, he had helped defeat the prosecution in the Lady Chatterley's Lover trial nearly two decades earlier.

The defence was led by John Mortimer, the creator of Rumpole of the Bailey, a fictional character who would have been at home in this factual case.

If the two lawyers were laughing when they went into the Old Bailey on July 4 1977, their smiles were soon shifted to the other side of their wigs. Justice King-Hamilton did not follow the usual practice of letting them join the prosecution in addressing the jury at the beginning of the trial. This meant that prosecuting counsel John Smyth could get in first without any immediate response.

Furthermore, while in the trial two decades earlier the defence had been able to rely on a list as long as Lady Chatterley's arm of professors and eminent critics happy to be friendly witnesses, the Gay News lawyers had to tear up the similar roll call they had prepared: this time literary quality was deemed irrelevant.

Also ruled out was theological discussion, which might have been able to dial down the amount of blasphemy involved. The judge ruled that since the jury had sworn on the New Testament, they were surely familiar with the general gist of Christianity and needed no further information.



Eminent novelist Margaret Drabble did not endear herself to the judge by replying to one of his questions that yes, she had showed the poem to her teenage son.

When the forthright Times columnist Bernard Levin declared that Gay News was a responsible paper, prosecuting counsel John Smyth queried how this view could be held: after all, it had given graphic tips on homosexual techniques. To this, Levin retorted that there were sex manuals for heterosexuals too.

The prosecution were careful to emphasise that homosexuality itself was not in the dock but it didn't always feel that way, particularly when Smyth declared: "It may be said that it is a love poem. It is not. It is a poem about buggery."

Summing up, the judge dismissed any idea that the law of blasphemy might be a 'dead letter'; its antiquity did not stop it being relevant today. More worrying for the defence – had they known it – was his later revelation that his hostile summing-up had been inspired by God. While the jury deliberated, Whitehouse organised public prayers.

They were answered. Both Gay News Ltd and John Lemon in person were guilty as charged, by a 10-to-2 majority verdict.

The next day, King-Hamilton passed down the sentences: a £1,000 fine for Gay News Ltd plus most of Whitehouse's £8,000 expenses. He fined Lemon himself £500 plus the remainder of the expenses.

Shockingly, he added a nine-month suspended prison sentence; it had been 'touch and go' whether he sent him straight to jail. He admitted in his autobiography that this was an extra he should not have opted for. It was deleted on appeal.

Also axed were the blasphemy laws, but not until 2008 and then only in England and Wales.

Epilogue: one person who never ended up in the dock was the late John Smyth, the prosecuting counsel. He turned out to be a serial abuser of boys. At the Christian camps where he was wont to help out, he used to beat the lads' bare bottoms until they were bruised and bleeding. His was truly the love that did not dare to speak its name.



*The Love That Dares
To Speak Its Name*





TechDownload

Chris Merriman on technology for journalists

byte size...

MIKE THAT GLOWS WITH GAIN CONTROL

Anker's rather splendid desktop microphone is perfect for both podcasting and conferencing. The Ankerwork PowerCast M300 Microphone has a built-in gain control and a headphone jack, plus an easy to access mute button for those coughs and expletives. It can also glow in one of 23 colours, if that's your thing. Grab one on Amazon for £59.99. <https://uk.ankerwork.com/products/a33x0>

MUSIC STUDIO WITH PRO FEATURES

If you want to do more with music than stream it, Ashampoo's Music Studio is one for the shopping list. Going beyond the likes of iTunes and MediaMonkey, Ashampoo's offering adds pro features such as editing music files, designing and printing CD covers, searching for lyrics, and hunting down song titles and artist names for mystery files. It's usually £34.99 but there are regular offers and bundle deals. ashampoo.com

A SEA-FRIENDLY TRACKING DEVICE

Tracking devices such as Apple's AirTags have taken a bit of criticism. We've included Tile (arguably the market leader) before, but another option is Chipolo. This has been around for a while with trackers in various shapes and sizes, but today we're saluting the Ocean Edition, made entirely from discarded fishing nets and sea plastic – an environmentally responsible way not to lose your keys for £26. chipolo.net

PICTURE PERFECT PHONE

I rarely include phones in these hallowed pages, simply because they've become pretty much all the same – a black rectangle with some refinements.

However, once in a while a benchmark helps and the latest flagship from Oppo, sister brand of OnePlus, is certainly that.

Running Android 12 out of the box, Oppo Find X5 Pro has thrown the kitchen sink at this one, with camera lenses designed by Hasselblad, offering 4K night vision photography – and that's the tip of the iceberg. The latest version of Oppo's charging tech means that if you use the official charger, you can go from zero to 90% in around 10 minutes.



This is Oppo's first phone with a neural processing unit – it uses AI to get your pics as perfect as possible. I've been taking it to jobs instead of my clunky camera and the results are more than good enough to print.

There's a 120Hz screen and, if the included 12GB RAM isn't enough, you can 'borrow' up to 9GB from the 256GB storage. In a phone, I'm after a toolkit for daily life that won't feel out of date in two years time. This fits the bill – though at £1,049 to buy outright, it ought to! <https://www.oppo.com>

> The world's press in your pocket

You may know Ready as part of your job, but have you ever tried it as a customer? The newspaper and magazine aggregator app

allows you to choose from thousands of publications from the UK and beyond. Opening the app is like going into a WH Smith – there are so many covers of print

publications in digital form, from today's Guardian to this week's Radio Times to this month's Good Housekeeping. It's handy if you're looking to research what the world is

saying about a topic you're writing about. There are gaps but it gives a comprehensive view of the world's press.

It's available on Android and iOS for £9.99 per month after a two-month free trial. <https://gb.readly.com>

Tiny USB hub packs a big punch

One of the best things that come in small packages is the tiny Twelve South StayGo Mini USB C Hub. It connects to your phone, tablet or computer and adds a full-sized USB port, an HDMI connector, a headphone jack and a pass-through for your charger, so you can charge it while it's plugged in. It plugs straight into a USB C port or via a 1m extension cable that comes in the box. There are similar products on the market, but the build quality and tiny size make this a perfect addition to your day bag.

Available on Amazon for £54.99.

MINI HUB, MANY PORTS

Thin a duplicate file collection

If you're like me, you've acquired so many hard disks and flash drives over the year that you're awash with multiple copies of the same file. I've been managing this issue with Duplicate Cleaner Pro for years and the latest version has some serious upgrades in terms of features and performance.

Take, for example, music files – you simply tell the app what drives to check and it will compare them, either through their digital 'signature' or by 'listening' to the audio and finding matching waveforms. It can also find duplicate photos and keep the ones with the highest resolution, or look for documents with the same file name.

The options seem endless, and those for choosing what to delete are completely granular. It's one of my most used Windows apps and, at £38, it's an absolute steal. Remember – tidy hard drive, tidy mind. Or something. digitalvolcano.co.uk



Don't push ageist ideas about technology skills



Stereotypes about older people cost them work, says **Penny Kiley**

When I tell people I work as a web editor, they often say “I’m not technical”.

“Neither am I,” I reply.

I’m not a web developer, I don’t write software and I’m not good with gadgets. I just know how to use the tools for the jobs I choose to do.

Also, I am over 60. And I get quite cross when I hear the view that having digital skills and getting older are mutually exclusive.

If you’ve suddenly discovered that you are missing the skills for the job you’re now expected to do, that might not be because of your age. It might just be because you’ve never needed them before. Or maybe it’s a lack of curiosity. The internet has, after all, been around for over 30 years. Didn’t you notice?

In the December/January issue of *The Journalist*, Jenny Sims wrote a Viewpoint piece called ‘NUJ should help us keep up with digital demands’, which discussed digital skills for older journalists using words like ‘struggle’ and ‘slow to learn’. It included a quote from assistant general secretary Séamus Dooley saying: “If there is a skills gap in relation to digital technology, I don’t think it is age-related and wonder if that suggestion in itself is not ageist.”

“Well, that’s another Viewpoint,” responded Sims.

This is it.

Yes, the (inaccurate) view that older people can’t do digital is ageist. And if the NUJ itself is promoting that view – even with good intentions – it provides ammunition for those who think older workers are past it. Please, let’s stop.

If the NUJ doesn’t have confidence in the abilities of its older members, how can it expect employers and the people

who commission freelancers to do so?

The longer these views remain widespread, the harder it is for older members to get work. As things stand, I cannot afford to let potential clients know how old I am, in case they make assumptions. And I don’t like having to hide my age – I’d rather be upfront and just say ‘this is what 60 looks like’.

It’s good that the 60+ Council is supporting the National Pensioners Convention’s campaign on digital inclusion/exclusion. It’s an important issue and it’s based on statistics. But let’s not perpetuate stereotypes that are based on anecdotal evidence or bias.

One example is last year’s delegate meeting motion from the 60+ Council about social media platforms ‘detering older people, including NUJ members, from going online’. My branch asked for the word ‘older’ to be replaced by ‘some’.

In the interests of diversity, let’s consider that there could be many reasons why an NUJ member might lack digital skills or confidence, such as background, inclination and opportunity. Age might be one factor but not the only one.

And in the interests of combating ageism, let’s consider that many older members have and are using a range of digital skills. Some of us have, after all, been around a long time and been doing it for decades.

As a youngish journalist in the last century, I realised I needed to keep growing my skills. And, as a freelance, I needed to be proactive, because no one would do it for me.

So I started with an evening course in computer literacy and went on from there. Some time in the late 1990s I did a two-day NUJ course on internet

research. That sounds pretty quaint now – almost as quaint, in fact, as having a ‘new media’ industrial council. None of this is actually new. We’ve had years to learn.

But even if you weren’t an early adopter, it’s not too late. It’s not as hard as it looks either.

Those of us who started out on typewriters have all learnt our way around word processing; content management systems such as WordPress are only one step further. If you’re used to marking up text, basic html is not that difficult.

Readability and usability are just other aspects of plain English. If you can do PR, you can do social media. And if you can write standfirsts, you can learn to do meta descriptions.

You could argue that the NUJ should help us to learn all of this. And they are – I’ve recently read about WordPress training from London freelance branch, and sessions on podcasting, search engine optimisation and social media from NUJ Scotland Training. These are provided regardless of age, and that’s how it should be.

Or, if you’re serious about skills development, you could widen your search and take responsibility for your own learning. There’s plenty out there.

It is worth it – partly because it will open work opportunities, partly because it’s fun and interesting, and partly just to prove we can do it.

And if anyone tries to tell you that older workers can’t do digital, do what I do and tell them: “Tim Berners-Lee is older than me, and he invented the world wide web.”

Penny Kiley is a freelance writer and editor and is social media officer for the NUJ’s Oxford & District branch

“
Tim Berners-Lee is
older than me, and
he invented the
world wide web
”

arts

by **Tim Lezard**

Festivals >

Livestock

Galway

July 1-2

It's summer, so it must be festival time! Let's start with Ireland's newest, which began life around a farm's kitchen table as a wedding event. It's now held annually on the farm, with music, art and activities, including performances from Kíla, Bunosciann, Jiggy, Galway Street Club and the intriguingly named John of the Apocalypse.

<https://tinyurl.com/ybewvnyx>

2000 Trees

Gloucestershire

July 7-9

A 15,000-capacity festival in the Cotswolds, watered with locally produced ciders, ales and lagers, is headlined by Jimmy Eat World, Thrice and Arts favourites IDLES. Anti-Flag are also playing. They're not headlining, but they ought to be.

<https://tinyurl.com/jx674vtb>

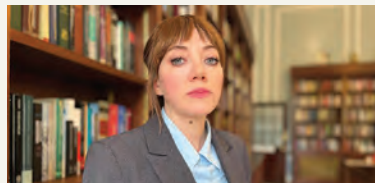
HebCelt

Outer Hebrides

July 13-16

This self-described 'cultural phenomenon' is where vibrant Gaelic and traditional music meet contemporary life. Headliners are Tidelines, Trail West, Texas and Treòir.

<https://tinyurl.com/2p83djuv>



Television >

Cunk on Earth

BBC2 and BBC iPlayer

Philomena Cunk is back! Four years after her take on Shakespeare, Charlie Brooker's mockumentary-maker, brought to life by Diane Morgan, returns to tell the story of our greatest, creative and mind-blowing concepts.

Books >

Monty Lit Fest

Montgomery

June 10-12

Making a welcome post-Covid return, this friendly festival promises culture and conversation. While there's an array of authors and poets, my eye was caught by the prospect of sharing a literary cricket tea with Marcus Berkman and Roger Morgan-Grenville.

<https://tinyurl.com/2fauy5we>

Black Sheep – a Story of Rural Racism, Identity and Hope

Sabrina Pace-Humphreys

Quercus Books

Pace-Humphreys' account of living in a rural town where no one looked like

her explores trauma, identity, mental health and addiction. It is a tale of triumph, grit – and hope over despair. <https://tinyurl.com/4f4tpuht>

Holding Tight, Letting Go: My Life, Death and All the Madness In Between

Sarah Hughes

Bonnier Books

These heart-breaking yet hopeful essays by the late Observer and Guardian journalist reflect on her two years with breast cancer. She asks how it feels to know you're going to die and, more importantly, what that teaches you about how to live.

<https://tinyurl.com/2p8zyyve>

Circus of Dreams

John Walsh

Little, Brown

John Walsh reflects on the 1980s when a generation of young writers – Amis, McEwan, Barnes, Boyd, Swift, Rushdie, Winterson and Barker – took the literary novel into a new realm.

<https://tinyurl.com/yx7rsazk>



Circus of Dreams



Adventures in the 1980s Literary World



John Walsh



Theatre >

Jerusalem

Apollo Theatre, London

Mark Rylance and Mackenzie Crook reprise their roles 12 years on as Johnny 'Rooster' Byron and Ginger in Jez Butterworth's lament for a lost England. <https://tinyurl.com/2hy76ahr>

Film >

The Railway Children Return

Jenny Agutter is back as Bobbie Waterbury with a new generation of railway children: evacuees. The film is shot at the same locations.



Tigers

Based on the story of teenage midfield prodigy Martin Bengtsson, this is a rollercoaster ride through the football industry and a reflection on obsession.

Comedy >

Gyles Brandreth – Break a Leg!

The former One Show reporter and MP is touring a show of high drama, low comedy and hilarious name-dropping. <https://tinyurl.com/4vp48fxn>



Chloe Petts

Transience

The Lol Word co-founder examines her attempts at living in the moment, darts and her (non-romantic) love for men. <https://tinyurl.com/5d5yhd4c>

Spotlight >

From FoC to grime poet

Paul Wellings – former father of chapel at Home Counties Newspapers as a teenager in 1981-83 and better known in music circles as Anti Social Worker – has released a timely new album addressing inequality.

His varied career has seen him tour with Billy Bragg, John Cooper Clarke and Benjamin Zephaniah, as well as DJing in Ibiza and at the Ministry of Sound.

Now he has turned his

hand to a new genre of music – grime poetry.

Stacked with cracking lines – "the only good system is a sound system" is my favourite – the album, *Militant Business and Grime Poetry*, is clever, cutting and angry.

Anti Social Worker doesn't hold back. "I make righteous anger music that comes

from a good heart in trying to bring unity, equality and peace," he tells Arts.

"The lyrics on this album are my whole life story about fighting against injustice but I'm a loveable rude boy – not a bad boy."

Check him out here:

<https://tinyurl.com/2c9uuy2p>



Starting Out

Nicholas Hatton wishes more people held councils to account



Surely the greatest reward for any journalist is to see their name 'in lights' at the top of a piece of work they have written.

For me, I was delighted to experience this when my work was included in my local newspaper, the Bromsgrove Advertiser.

I grew up reading the Advertiser. I first learnt the thrill of being included within its hallowed pages after putting in a fine performance at a swimming gala. As much of an honour as it was to represent my town at a sport, I think that getting my own writing published within the Advertiser's pages must go down as one of the proudest moments of my life.

As part of my work placement, I attended a town council meeting. It was great to see the look on the councillors' faces when the person who had been sending them nagging letters about potholes and roadworks was sitting there on the press desk, holding them to account.

I was disappointed to have been the sole representative of a local newspaper there. The meeting was quite an important one. The members were discussing the budget for the forthcoming year. This involved some difficult decisions – such as the one that was reported in the Advertiser to increase council tax.

The public have only been permitted to attend local council meetings since 1985, with the assent of the Local Government Act of that year. This needs to be placed in the historical context of the political turmoil of the 1980s.

During the early years of that decade, several councils were disbanded and some Labour members were expelled from the party, having run up debts. The Labour members responsible were part of a faction known as Militant. The most well known of these authorities was Liverpool City Council, where deputy leader Derek Hatton (no relation to myself) was a key Militant figure.

This all took place within the context of the miners' strikes of the decade and the famous crackdown on trade union activity that was issued by the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher.

Who knows if local councils would have been allowed to overspend to such an extent had they been held publicly accountable.

It concerns me that few members of the public or the press appear to take up the privileges afforded to them by this legislation. I think it is important that people feel empowered to participate in decision-making at every level of government.

Of course, it would be tempting for the government to say that if people were not taking advantage of this right, it would make no difference if it were removed. This would lead to a corresponding decrease in accountability and the possibility of a repeat of the Militant scandal.

As part of our NCTJ course, we had a talk from a specialist local democracy reporter, Gurdeep Thandi. Thandi was passionate about the work he did. He explained that he was employed as part of the BBC's local democracy

scheme and felt that local newspapers may have benefited more from a court reporting scheme instead.

Personally, I can understand the reservations regarding this service. It seems to me that newspapers are too reliant on the service to send their own reporters to cover council meetings. In addition, by essentially monopolising the 'industry' of reporting on council meetings, the BBC are imparting their own worldview on proceedings.

Of course, the BBC would argue that, as an organisation that is funded by taxpayers, it is neutral. However, there are certain ways of doing things at the BBC that may not be appropriate for local politics. For example, the London-centric nature of the organisation may be less understanding of the issues faced by rural and regional communities.

I wouldn't want to judge as, if I were offered a job at the BBC, I would most likely take it. However, as a newcomer to journalism, I believe I have a unique perspective on such issues that more experienced, more 'world-weary' journalists may be lacking.

I am certainly grateful for the NUJ's support on my journey. I wore my NUJ student press card with pride at the council meeting. It was a relief to know there would be support if anyone at the council questioned my right to attend the meeting or my motives for writing about it.



I was disappointed to have been the sole representative of a local newspaper there

@n_p_hatton

War without journalism?

Unthinkable.

Journalists & their crews are risking their lives to bring you the facts about the war in Ukraine. A free & fair press to shine a light on truth has never been more important.

#supportjournalism

What made you become a journalist?

I studied law at university, but soon found that I was spending more time editing the student newspaper than I was studying law so it seemed logical to become a journalist.



What other job might you have done/have you done?

A minor politician perhaps (oh, hang on, I did that, too).

When did you join the NUJ?

In 1969 when I was accepted onto the Mirror Group Newspapers training scheme.

Are many of your friends in the union?

They were when I was a full-time journalist but that was many moons ago.

What's been your best moment in your career?

About 4pm on the afternoon of March 14 1991 outside the Old Bailey, facing the world's TV cameras alongside the Birmingham Six.

What is the worst place you've ever worked in?

A Birds Eye pea vinery in Norfolk – 12 hours on 12 hours off, seven days a week and 16 hours every second Sunday – for about four shillings an hour in old money.



NUJ & me

Chris Mullin is an author, journalist and former MP

And the best?

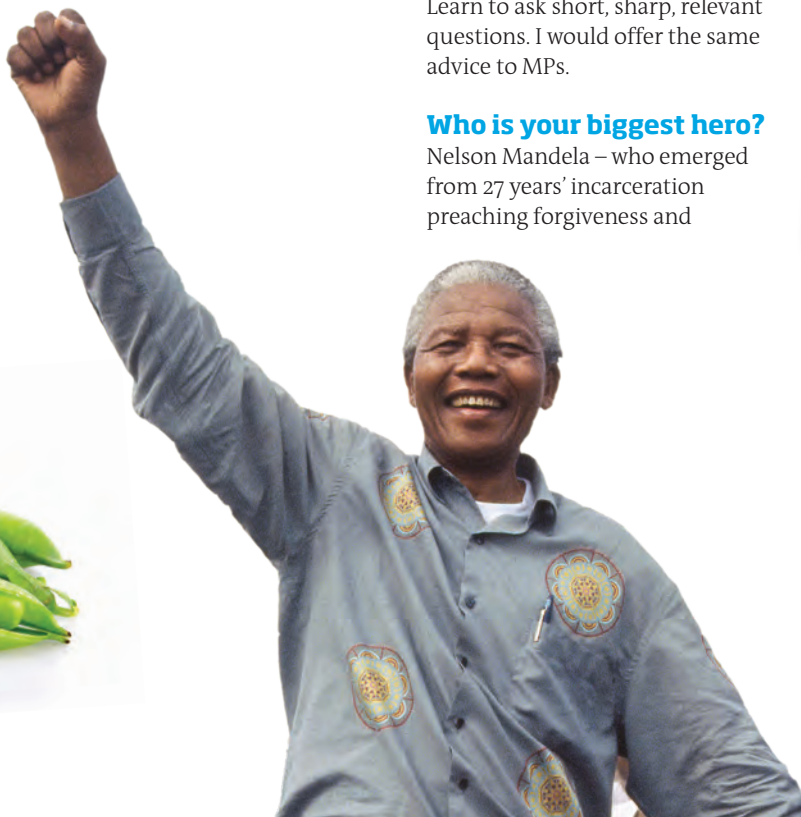
The Foreign office – as Africa minister

What advice would you give someone starting in journalism?

Learn to ask short, sharp, relevant questions. I would offer the same advice to MPs.

Who is your biggest hero?

Nelson Mandela – who emerged from 27 years' incarceration preaching forgiveness and



reconciliation. I once spent a memorable 40 minutes in his company.

And villain?

The current front runner has to be Vladimir Putin

Which six people (alive or dead) would you invite to a dinner party?

Wilf Burchett, Lyse Doucet, Orla Guerin, Clare Hollingworth, John Simpson, Martin Woollacott – all great foreign correspondents.



What was your earliest political thought?

That the Vietnam war was not a mistake – it was a crime.



What are your hopes for journalism over the next five years?

That there will still be space in the mainstream media for those with views outside the consensus.

And fears?

That there might not be.

How would you like to be remembered?

As someone who made a difference -- though, alas, not enough.

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How journalists only make things worse



It's the bringers of bad news who create crises, **Chris Proctor** is told

As a profession, journalism involves a lot of waiting. My preferred location for this activity is inside a pub. I consider licensed premises to be my natural habitat. And I can't resist falling into conversation with anyone standing at a bar – even when I know it's not a good idea.

These chance encounters can result in a lively exchange and an insight into a different view of life, leaving one with warm feelings about our common species, our shared experiences and general solidarity. On other days, like last week in Camden Town, not so.

I suppose I should have noticed that the gentleman I greeted had three pints of a lager/cider mixture in front of him and was a stranger equally to the dentist and the bathroom. It soon became apparent that he was ready and willing to disperse his prejudices to a wider audience: me.

"Do you know who's behind all this Ukrainian business?" he enquired.

I hesitated. My inclination is to adopt elastic views on most issues when dealing with strangers. I don't go into pubs for an argument and, anyway, I'm a terrible coward.

This inclination reached its zenith during the Troubles in the 1970s, when I emerged from a West Belfast fish-and-chip shop to discover a large group of young gentleman on the pavement who all seemed to be polishing hatchets. My chips froze as one of their number enquired whether I supported the bombing campaign on the mainland.

Truth to tell, I've never been an advocate of explosions down my street. Or anybody else's, I hasten to add. But

especially mine. But, while I had clear views, I was inclined to conceal them.

Clearly, if my interlocutors happened to be aficionados of the Provisional wing of the republican movement, the advisable answer would have been: "Yes, I most certainly do. The more bombs the merrier." However, I remained unsure of their opinions and hence hesitant. I wanted to ensure harmony between my views and theirs.

As I struggled with possible responses, like the solicitor's "On the one hand... and then again... on the other", my opinions were clarified when another of their number mentioned that I looked like an 'Effing Sticky', which identified them as Provisionals. Safe now, I professed an enthusiastic welcome for the indiscriminate maiming and murder of innocent citizens in my homeland.

Adopting the same cautious approach with my new bar-room friend, I claimed not to have thought about the Ukrainian crisis. Some folk, I mentioned, thought it might be Putin. He sneered.

"Journalists," he said. "Ruddy journalists."

I regretted not having bought a half pint I could toss off in a single gulp.

"If they didn't tell everyone what was going on, no one would have to worry about it."

"I see."

And did I know who was responsible for the shortage of cooking oil, of which not a drop was to be found in the land? Supplies were at snake-belly level.

I guessed journalists. And I was right.

"The only reason people are stockpiling is because journalists have told them there's going to be a shortage."

My attempt to slide doorwards was impeded by his vigorous insistence

that we have a drink, which involved me purchasing him a hop/apple mélange as he continued to expound his theories.

"And what about electricity prices?"

"Journalists?"

Correct.

Pensioners across the land are switching off heaters as journalists have convinced them there will be enormous price rises they will not be able to afford.

"They couldn't afford it last week either, but they kept their heaters on. But now journalists have frightened the life out of them. They're killing off the elderly by the score."

He universalised his theories, telling me emphatically: "You only make it worse by telling people what's going on."

A mixture of stout and my desire not to antagonise my companion led me to consider this, if only for a moment. Did he have a point? As a follower of Everton football club, my life would certainly have been happier had I not been acquainted with this season's results.

I pulled myself together.

"I can't see how reporting it truthfully makes it worse?" I mumbled.

"Of course it does. It makes you worry about it. Are you bothered about Russians firing nuclear missiles at us?"

This was becoming a déjà-vu experience from Belfast. One eye on the door, I said that it couldn't be a good thing to be ignorant.

"Why not if you don't have to worry?"

I thrust the remaining stout down my throat and, emboldened by its properties, I called over my shoulder as I made a hasty exit, "Actually, I'm a journalist."

Before the door slammed I heard his final words.

"Me too," he said. "Have a good 'un."

The only reason people are stockpiling cooking oil is because journalists have told them there's going to be a shortage



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