



September 2021 Branch

When we issued an urgent call to all NUJ members to dig deep and donate to the IFJ's special Afghanistan Safety Fund appeal, I felt sure members would be supportive and responsive. The scale of that generosity, however, blew me away

The response from across the union was unparalleled, providing much needed positivity over the coming days and weeks which have been dominated by unrelenting frustration and set-backs in the battle to secure safe passage for journalists from Afghanistan.

A wave of individual donations was made in the 24 hours after the appeal was sent out and this was followed by pledges and donations from branches across the union. The scale of donations from BBC members in London – £10,000 each from BBC London and BBC World Service branches – reflected how close to home the crisis was, with over 150 BBC staff in Kabul facing enormous risk and uncertainty.

For some months ahead of August the BBC was engaged with staff in Afghanistan over the restructure of editorial work from its Kabul office – planning to move a smaller team to Delhi and offer severance payments to remaining staff. As local hires, outside of the bargaining unit in the UK, the BBC repeatedly refused to engage with the NUJ, and refused our request to carry out individual risk assessments. Right up to the fall of Kabul, the BBC's position remained that none of the team were at high risk, even their women journalists – patent nonsense when news was coming in from other parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban had taken control of targeted attacks and even killings of journalists.

From this point on, I was engaged in daily briefings with the BBC director general's chief of staff and we worked hard to engage with the Foreign Office over our demands for all journalists with

links to the UK to be given visas. In the end the government started to issue visa waivers which facilitated the evacuation of around 47 BBC staff and families before the airport closed. Some also escaped under their own steam, but 74 staff and their families – some 320 people in total – are still waiting to be brought out of Afghanistan.

Donate

Donate to the IFJ's Afghanistan Solidarity Fund (within the IFJ Safety Fund). All money raised will go directly to providing support to Afghan colleagues.
<https://www.ifj.org/safety-fund.html#c502>

The BBC effort has been intense since a crisis team involving executives at the highest level was mobilised. The reality is that it came too late, and amid the chaotic and bungled countdown to evacuation of troops, time soon ran out with plan B options for charter flights to Qatar and Pakistan impossible once the airport was closed down.

Weeks later, the situation is frustratingly slow and gaining clarity from the government bogged down by needless bureaucracy and dithering. The visa waiver scheme has been set aside, replaced by the new resettlement scheme which to date has no priority category for journalists at risk.

The NUJ has been inundated with appeals for help from individual journalists which we immediately lodged with the Foreign Office High Risk Afghan



unit. The IFJ has pulled out all the stops, triaging cases and matching up high risk journalists with those governments who have provided safe passage.

The IFJ is in close contact with its two affiliates in Afghanistan, and despite the difficulties in getting money into the country, was able to provide urgent financial support to assist journalists, more than a thousand of whom have lost their jobs and income.

Around 80 per cent of donations to the IFJ appeal have come from the NUJ. Already some of that funding has paid for emergency shelter and food. Both affiliates are supporting nearly 400 internally displaced journalists, mostly in Kabul and a small number in other provinces.

We are also exploring outreach for Afghan journalists arriving in the UK, the NCTJ is keen to help provide training, and efforts are being made to encourage media outlets to provide work placements and jobs. Any further effort amongst branches to fundraise would be amazing, with every penny of donations going to support fellow journalists in the greatest of need.

In Solidarity

Michelle Stanistreet

“Every minute I fear they will try to find and kill me”

Hundreds of journalists working in Afghanistan have fled or gone into hiding following the seizure of power by the Taliban.

The leader of one of the IFJ's affiliates in Afghanistan, who has worked for over 20 years with international media as a reporter and senior editor, spoke to the International Federation of Journalists.

As a journalist it is hard to work under the Taliban because they see every journalist as an enemy or as working against them. They have violated the existing legislation, they have not set out any clear policy, they don't allow access to information and prevent news coverage of issues they don't want reported. I have worked mostly with international media, mainly from the UK and US, and they want to punish journalists who have worked the western media. My life is at risk and every minute I fear they will try to find and arrest me or kill me.

As a trade unionist I feel my life is even more in danger because I was protecting national and international journalists and media workers' rights and I was critical of the Taliban policy, fighting for press freedom

and freedom of expression. I have been at the frontline of protecting journalists' rights, holding press conferences, issuing statements critical of the Taliban over the past 20 years. For these reasons, I have restricted myself, changed my location and kept a very low profile, but it will be difficult to continue in the long run.

Media shows, managers and workers have seen their rights removed. Many media programmes have been stopped. TV and radio stations need to run all programmes with a religious angle. But these programmes do not appeal to citizens. The younger generation and children have nothing to watch or listen to. There is only a small number of advertisements and without that revenue it is

impossible to survive. More than 153 media outlets have collapsed in over 20 provinces. The results of 20 years of democratic process and international support are falling to pieces.

Most experienced and professional women journalists have left the country or remain at home and are not working. A small number still work for TV or radio channels as anchors. It is hard now for them to report from the field or shoot with cameras.

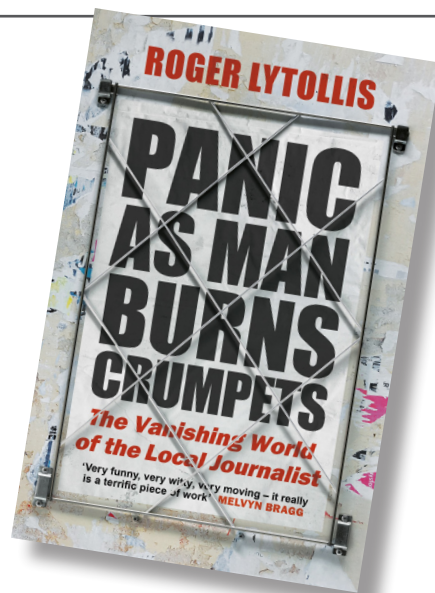
We witnessed in the past few weeks journalists being arrested for covering demonstrations, public gatherings and public demands for freedom. If journalists do not respect the new rules and instructions they will be targeted or arrested, some will disappear. Coverage for international media is becoming harder and more difficult.

Journalists are facing serious financial problems, many are not getting paid, we have no access to our bank accounts and there is no cash available. Even if the media had access to their bank accounts, they would not be able to pay salaries because they have limited income and no sponsored programmes or advertising revenues. Urgent international support is needed to help the media survive.



Local Features Matter

Roger Lytollis' book celebrates the days when local newspaper journalists were respected by readers ... most of the time



The idea of writing a book about my time in local papers was born in 2018. CN Group, the Cumbria-based, family-owned publisher where I'd spent most of my career, had just been bought by Newsquest. As a feature writer, I knew my days were numbered.

And, yes, I was made redundant in 2019. By the end of the following year, Newsquest's six papers in Cumbria had no feature writers, no photographers, no sub-editors and one sports journalist. The July 2021 edition of NUJ Informed reported that, since the takeover, staffing had been slashed from 300 to 30.

I wanted to document the decline of local papers and the contrast between the present and when my career began in the 1990s. Back then it seemed that everyone bought, or at least read, their local paper. Numerous factors – not least publishers sabotaging themselves by giving away their work online – had contributed to the decline. Now companies such as Newsquest squeezed profits from understaffed newsrooms. I was pretty sure that

the wider public had no idea about the conditions journalists worked under. One motivation for writing my book was the hope that shining a light on this might help to reduce the aggression towards journalists, which has increased even for those on local papers.

Three weeks before my book's publication, Newsquest chief executive, Henry Faure Walker, was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List "for services to regional news journalism and charity". A month earlier, Newsquest had issued NUJ members at the Oxford Mail with termination notices after they rejected a proposal to end time-and-a-half pay for working bank holidays.

During my last year before redundancy, I saw clickbait culture creep into the newsroom. Misleading website headlines were loaded with celebrities' names. Businesses and other organisations supplied stories for free, replacing those written by now-departed colleagues. Features with no connection to our patch were sourced from agencies.

It really wasn't always like

this. My book also recalls when newspapers were at the heart of their communities, when newsrooms were places of camaraderie and laughter as well as deadline-driven outbursts. I was privileged for almost 25 years to interview ordinary people with extraordinary stories or just report the nuts and bolts of everyday life. Great times for journalists and, most importantly, for readers.

Panic as Man Burns Crumpets:

the vanishing world of the local journalist (published by Little, Brown) is an often-amusing tale of Roger's time in newspapers, from the dreaded task of conducting vox pops, heart-warming tales of local people, stripping off to write a feature about naturists, to the day-to-day banter of newsroom colleagues and foul-mouthed news editors. Roger is happy to speak (online) to branches about his book and the newspaper industry. You can contact him at rogerlytollis@gmail.com

CAMPAIGN

04

Tell Patel we're not enemy spies



Tim Dawson puts together a plan to counter dangerous new proposals from the government

In August 1937 a court in Stockport fined NUJ member, EDG Lewis, £5 for breaching the Official Secrets Act (OSA). The prosecution alleged that his story for the Daily Dispatch was based on a classified police circular. Lewis refused to reveal his source.

He was the first but, alas, not the last NUJ member charged under this law. More recently the OSA was used during the August 2018 arrest of investigative Belfast journalists, Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey, over a secret report used during their documentary into the Loughinisland killing of six men by a loyalist paramilitary group in 1994. NUJ members have also been targeted for breaching the Act by writing about the surveillance agency GCHQ, concerns about the safety of Trident, and undercover police officers spying on the Stephen Lawrence family.

Throughout 1938, NUJ members lobbied MPs to amend the legislation. The union's general secretary, Clement Bundock, sensed ministers shifting ground but feared journalists were still vulnerable. Despite the gathering clouds of war, the NUJ upped the pressure. Civil liberties groups joined the cause. The union convened a major public meeting

with a platform of MPs, editors, general secretaries and Whisky Galore author, Compton Mackenzie. Finally, Home Secretary, Samuel Hoare, relented and proposed an amendment to the Act removing that jeopardy.

Today Boris Johnson's government proposes to blur the lines between journalists and hostile spies; increase the length of prison sentences risked by journalists; downgrade protections for special procedure material (as defined in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act); and provide no fresh protections for whistleblowers. We can use evidence and members' experiences to argue against these proposals.

Grahame Morris MP, co-chair of the NUJ's cross-party parliamentary group, explained why individual testimony was so important: "MPs have to intervene in arguments all the time – when ministers are questioned at the despatch box, in select and standing committees and, more generally, when legislation is being considered. What MPs say has more authority and relevance when it is backed up by actual experiences or concerns that come from our constituents."

Karin Smyth, MP for Bristol South,

agrees: "Representation from expert constituents has been revelatory to me and parliamentary colleagues of all political hues."

With Official Secrets, of course, we do have a tradition to maintain; if we apply effort, NUJ members can reduce the harm inherent in those reforms. We may not win every battle but with effort, we can make a real difference.

Action Plan

- Organise a meeting with an expert speaker. Use your members' contacts.
- Report the meeting to the wider branch – non-attendees sometimes provide the best leads, including celebrity names.
- Devise deliverable medium-term objectives – an MP calling a round-table meeting or establishing an inquiry can really make a difference.
- Contact firebrand, campaigning MP to rabble-rouse in Parliament or choose a more discreet Knight of the Shire to influence those in power behind closed doors.
- Link up with other local activist organisations.



Providing succour

Professor Chris Frost asks branches to get involved in the Ethics Council's campaign on reporting refugees and asylum seekers

The catastrophe in Afghanistan which led to hundreds of media workers abandoned to the mercies of the Taliban was one of the recent refugee outrages perpetrated by this government

It stands alongside the Home Office's bizarre manoeuvrings to discover ways to prevent a few dozen boats from landing refugees on the south coast as a clear indication that this government has little sympathy for those caught in war and disaster through no fault of their own.

Many reporters have been forced to stand by, limited in their work, while the government condemns those caught in unimaginable horror as they try to seek safety.

The union's code of conduct obliges members to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair and says members should not produce 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.

The union's Ethics Council has a duty to uphold the code and to promote high ethical standards and

has decided to campaign strongly over the year to encourage the ethical reporting of refugees and asylum seekers.

The council supported a recent seminar hosted by campaign charity IMIX, discussing the problems Australian colleagues faced with their battle for ethical reporting of their own boat people. The issue is even more pressing as the government seeks to introduce its controversial Nationality and Borders Bill that will make it illegal for anyone to assist entry. This could include RNLI rescuers saving those whose boat has capsized and possibly journalists attempting to interview asylum seekers. The Ethics Council is preparing a campaign to have major parts of this Bill overturned.

Our campaign will remind members of the UNHCR Refugee convention, drawn up in 1951, to provide support and safety to those fleeing war and disaster. The Convention identifies what a refugee is as opposed to a migrant who can rely on the protection of their

own government, even when abroad seeking a new life with family or for study. We need to inform journalists that the convention does not insist that refugees must seek succour in the first country they reach. The Ethics Council is asking branches to get involved.

The NUJ's Ethics Council is planning an online public meeting on ethical reporting of the Afghan crisis, asylum and refugees on Thursday 7 October at 17.00 (BST/GMT). Save the date and more details will be announced soon.

Action

- Invite a refugee journalist(s) in your area to branch meetings, encourage them to join the NUJ and help them settle into life here.

- Assist one of the many organisations that seek to help refugees in your local area.

- Support the IFJ campaign for the safety of journalists in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

CAMPAIGN

06



#SaveOurBooks

Catherine Brereton, NEC member for Books, asks branches to take action to protect copyright on books post-Brexit

I imagine a world with fewer books, by fewer authors, for fewer readers. That is what we could see if the UK government changes how copyright works. As part of its shake-up of trading conditions in the post-Brexit landscape there is a very real threat that it will choose to do just that, starving the UK publishing industry of much of its income and so diminishing and damaging this

vital creative powerhouse. Moving to a different model could slash the sales revenue of UK publishers. #SaveOurBooks is a campaign by UK authors, literary agents, publishers and other supporters to prevent the government from changing the existing regulatory model to what is termed "the exhaustion of intellectual property rights". Currently, authors and illustrators receive home royalties on the main UK edition (often high-priced), and much lower royalties on other editions (often lower priced). An international model would mean a UK importer (including, for example, an online giant) could sell any edition in the UK – a potential double undercutting – of cheaper product and lower royalty. The author and illustrator receive less. The publisher receives less. Another valuable UK asset is undersold on the world stage. Prominent industry figures have commented that publishers will be less able to take chances on

new books, new talents and more diverse voices – at a time when we need them to be doing this more. Increasing knowledge, literacy and access to books through selling local editions in certain developing countries may also become economically unviable.

UK publishing is one of the success stories of the UK cultural sector. It contributes £6 billion per year to the UK economy, grew by 5.5 per cent even in 2020, and is a key driver of other creative industries including TV and film. Yet it is beset with problems of low pay, unequal pay, lack of transparency and lack of meaningful diversity.

Those of us in the industry – including the NUJ's 700-plus members working in the books sector – want to make publishing more diverse, more vibrant, more equitable and a better place for its workers. We don't want to risk the opposite.

Many of us in the NUJ are book industry workers, book authors or illustrators, whether it is our main job or not. All of us depend on the protection of copyright. All of us are readers and all of us have an interest in a thriving publishing culture in the UK. We are asking all NUJ members to support the #SaveOurBooks campaign.

Action

Sign the open letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy here

<https://www.saveourbooks.org.uk/news>

Write to your MP <https://www.saveourbooks.org.uk/get-involved>

Share on social media
<https://twitter.com/SaveOurBooksUK>

TRAINING

07



Autumn action

Reps' trainer Caroline Holmes outlines courses to solve workplace problems and win a pay deal

After the August lull there's lots of activity and workplace issues for reps to deal with this autumn.

The good news is that local newspapers are recruiting and that's why I am running two organising and recruitment training sessions on Wednesday 29 September and Wednesday 27 October. This course is for reps who want to develop membership engagement and activity in their branch or chapel. It is an opportunity to share ideas and good practice with other reps and to explore how to recruit and encourage the participation of members in chapel and branch work.

The four-stage reps' programme continues apace. You will learn a range of skills, including understanding how to improve your approach to negotiating, developing your confidence when representing members, and knowing what rights you have as a NUJ rep in an unrecognised and recognised workplace. While health and safety (H&S) and equality issues are inbuilt components of all our training work, there are also specific H&S workshops and on Tuesday 9 November you can start the first

stage of our two-part training course to become an equality rep.

The effects of the pandemic are still being felt sharply by members, particularly freelancers. As workplaces start to grapple with issues raised by members with Long Covid and the return to offices, NUJ Training can help. I am working with officials, the NUJ's legal officer and the TUC to make sure reps feel confident and have the support they need to ensure employers are being responsible in the way they manage people, particularly those with health issues, coming back into the office or a facing a future of working from home.

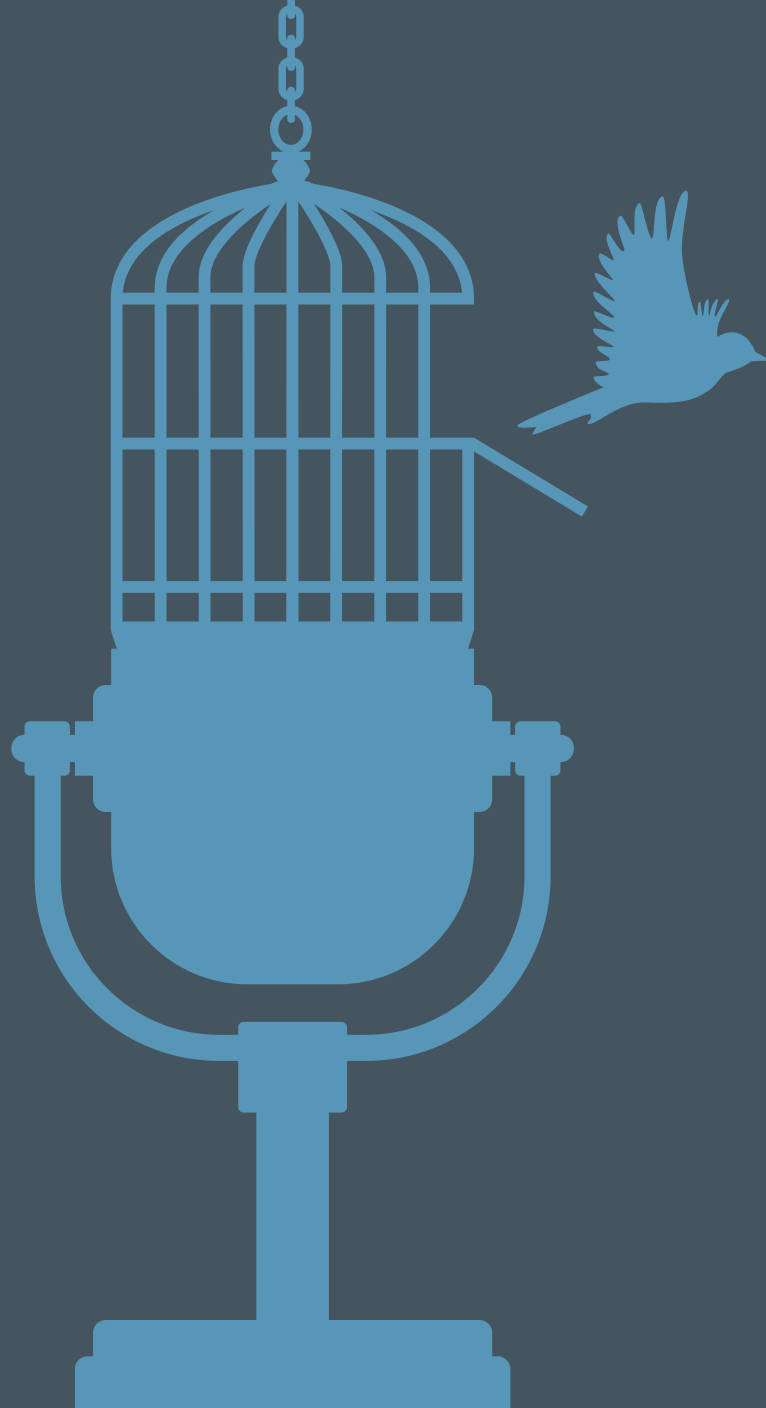
All trade union training dates: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/learn/ems-event-calendar.html>
Email tuttraining@nuj.org.uk if you have a query

Fancy freelancing? NUJ professional training can help people make the leap into becoming a freelance writer or photographer. Check out the latest Professional Training dates on the website and book your place: www.nuj.org.uk/learn/nuj-training.html

Professional courses

To coincide with the Glasgow COP26 Climate Conference, NUJ Training Scotland will be providing climate emergency training for NUJ members as part of the autumn schedule. Other professional Zoom training includes: search engine optimisation; creative writing for wellbeing; improving computer literacy; filming & editing on iDevices; how to be a great news writer; Photoshop introduction; InDesign Introduction; The effective freelance; social media for journalists; introduction to podcasting; introduction to scriptwriting. Zoom courses cost £40 for a one-session course and £60 for two sessions. They are open to members outside Scotland, contact joanm@nuj.org.uk for more information. Go to the website: www.nujtrainingscotland.com/
NUJ Training Wales also has an exciting programme. Find out more on the website: www.nujtrainingwales.org/

REASONS TO JOIN



Press Freedom

The NUJ lobbies for journalists' rights so you can protect your sources, have editorial independence and do your job safely and freely, without censorship from the state. As a member of the International Federation of Journalists we are part of a 600,000-strong community working to ensure the safety of media workers across the globe, fighting for freedom of information, open government and plurality of the media.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join

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NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

www.nuj.org.uk