

# NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE Informed

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## NUJ to join Together march

**At the delegate meeting in Blackpool last year the union renewed its commitment to opposing racism and uniting against the far right.**

In late January the National Executive Council (NEC) agreed that the union should have a physical delegation at the upcoming Together Alliance demonstration in London on Saturday 28 March. We will march as part of a trade union bloc, joining colleagues from sister unions from the Broadcasting, Entertainment & Arts Unions (BEAU), the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG) and Trades Union Congress (TUC). By marching together, we will show that hope and solidarity are much stronger forces than hate and division. Join the NUJ bloc by [registering online](#).

On page 4, Roger McKenzie, Black Members' Council (BMC) co-chair, explains why it's important for members across the union to come together and march under the NUJ banner on 28 March, while Alexandria Slater, campaigns and communications officer, reflects on the union's webinar on responding to the threat of the far right (page 5).

The NEC also congratulated members at STV for their one-day strike at the start of the year, taking most programmes off-air and demonstrating that STV News cannot be produced on a daily basis without its journalists. The NEC expressed backing to members at STV should they wish to take further action. Read the latest on STV on page 3.

The NEC also agreed to the creation of a new AI and Copyright Committee with representation from sector councils. The union has been busy campaigning for control, consent and compensation for workers amid the rapid deployment of

artificial intelligence across the media. In recent months we have put members' concerns directly to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and submitted responses to consultations on AI and copyright by both the UK and Irish governments.

While giving evidence to the Joint Oireachtas Committee, Séamus Dooley, NUJ Irish secretary, urged stronger legislation to protect journalism and a tech tax on platforms who have "pillaged and profited from the media sector with financial impunity." Dooley insisted that journalists have always adapted to the introduction of new technology but said that in many workplaces AI has been "imposed without any consultation whatsoever, and it has huge implications on how you do your work, and whether you have a job at all or not."

Meanwhile members at the Gaelic language station Raidió na Gaeltachta have welcomed an agreement with RTÉ marking the end of an unfair two-tier

pay system within Irish public service broadcasting through the assimilation of staff onto the standard RTÉ radio grading structure. Under terms put forward by RTÉ's industrial relations tribunal, improvements have been made to a structure proposed by management.

The agreement allows all staff to benefit from two incremental payments in June. Dooley said: "There is also a small group of people who, because of age and service, would not yet benefit from the tribunal measures. Special measures are being put in place to ensure they are not disadvantaged. This is a highly significant achievement after decades of campaigning"

In the UK the Employment Rights Act represents a momentous step forward in strengthening workers' rights and trade unions' ability to organise and defend members' interests. Nanya Joseph, NUJ legal assistant, explains what the Act means for workers, reps and the wider trade union movement on page 6.



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**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
OF  
JOURNALISTS

# Live from Laura



## Free speech depends on our ability to protect journalists and their sources.

**Our work in recent months has focused strongly on the right of journalists to do their work freely and without interference.**

Earlier this month I attended the TUC Women's Conference in Bournemouth, joining sister unions in coordinating action to address the inequalities, harassment and violence too many women still face in the workplace.

At a fringe event on assaults at work, I shared initial findings from our ***Journalists' Safety Tracker*** - which reveals a worrying pattern of violent, graphic abuse directed at women journalists.

The NUJ's composited motion, which urged support for ethical journalism and media plurality over harmful sexist and racist narratives, passed unanimously and was selected to go to the TUC Congress in Brighton in September.

Collaborative work with our sister unions is a key aspect of our anti-racism

work. I look forward to joining the Together Alliance demonstration on 28 March and hope to see many of you joining the NUJ bloc on the day. Members can plan their journey or find coaches travelling to the march through the ***Together Alliance website***.

The ability of journalists to protect themselves and their sources has been in the spotlight in recent weeks. In February, the assistant general secretary and I joined member Vincent Kearney outside the Royal Courts of Justice in his case against police and security services over unlawful surveillance. You can read Séamus' full reflections on page 8. We have submitted a parliamentary motion calling for an independent inquiry into suspected surveillance and smearing of journalists by the think tank Labour Together and commercial firm APCO Worldwide, plus stronger legislation to prevent corporate actors targeting journalists and their sources.

Journalists' safety and media freedom have been under threat not only in the UK and Ireland, but around the globe. Grim figures published by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) show that 2025 was another year plagued by the killing and imprisonment of those who risk everything to report the truth (more on page 12).

The US-Israeli attacks on Iran and subsequent retaliatory strikes risk the lives of many journalists who are at the forefront of covering and analysing the war. Iran, Israel and the US have all displayed contempt for the rights of journalists and we are gravely concerned for colleagues on the frontline. Our parliamentary group has submitted a timely ***motion*** calling for a binding UN Convention to protect media workers.

The war highlights the vital role of journalists at the World Service and BBC Persian, who have worked tirelessly to provide trusted coverage of daily attacks to millions in Iran. They do this despite internet blackouts, bare staffing levels due to years of cuts, and an escalating campaign of intimidation by Iranian

authorities. I was pleased to attend a parliamentary event this month to show solidarity with members at BBC Persian and we continue to urge the UK government to demonstrate its commitment to global press freedom by ending the uncertainty over the World Service's funding.

Securing the World Service's future is a key demand in our 'Back the BBC' ***campaign***. The union has responded to the government's Charter Review consultation, calling for sustainable funding for the broadcaster, political independence and worker representation to the BBC board. It was positive to have some of our main calls echoed in the corporation's own submission with the BBC even nabbing our campaign slogan! We have also raised members' calls to DCMS, briefed MPs at a parliamentary event held with BEAU, and organised a meeting between some of our NUJ BBC reps and the culture secretary, Lisa Nandy. Our parliamentary group - who have been particularly busy in recent months - have amplified members' Charter Renewal demands as well as our comprehensive calls to safeguard the future of local media in debates at Westminster (see page 10).

At the last parliamentary group meeting in February, we highlighted the appalling treatment of workers at Iconic Media and the anti-union tactics of its CEO Malcolm Denmark. We have conducted a health and safety survey at Iconic, and we'll be working with members to address issues around pay, conditions and collective bargaining. Stay tuned for campaign updates.

While we expressed disappointment at the removal of day one protection from unfair dismissal, we are optimistic that the new Employment Rights Act will improve working conditions, offering greater security, fairer treatment, and safer workplaces.

Recent months have also demonstrated the tangible differences trade unions make to workers' daily lives.

## Ofconned

**The NUJ has told Ofcom that it made a fundamental mistake in taking STV's arguments at face value when provisionally accepting the company's plans to cut jobs and vital programming.**

The Scottish broadcaster currently provides two news services - one for the central belt and the other for the north and north-east - but has requested a licence change to produce a single programme for both regions, anchored from Glasgow. This would spell the end of the very successful north edition of the News at 6.

These plans have been opposed by its own journalists - with NUJ members going on strike in January - as well as by 83% of viewers and leaders of Scotland's five main political parties.

STV has attributed the planned cuts to changing trends in news consumption. However, as the union made clear in its consultation response to the regulator, STV made the decision after a sudden financial hit resulting from its own mismanagement. Yet, Ofcom has accepted and echoed STV's framing. In fact, the regulator astonishingly described the changes as the "best thing for audiences across Scotland."

If Ofcom naïvely accepts the proposals, this could set a precedent for other public service broadcasters to reduce their local news provisions. The regulator has postponed its decision until after the Scottish election, placing further strain on STV journalists. Ofcom must put the public interest first and say 'no'.

We should, however, celebrate the excellent work of our reps and national organiser for Scotland, Nick McGowan Lowe, assisted by organiser Andy Curry, who have worked tirelessly to support members at STV and reduce the number of compulsory redundancies from 30 to zero.

**REASONS TO JOIN**

**Be Part of a Collective Voice**

As a member of the NUJ you are part of a united force championing the rights of media workers and defending attacks on press freedom. Successful workplaces are those where the management and workers share the same aims and talk to each other. Being a member of the NUJ means giving yourself and colleagues a real voice at work.

**Are you keeping good company?**

Join the NUJ today at [nuj.org.uk/join](http://nuj.org.uk/join)

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[www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)

I was thrilled to see a range of activity during HeartUnions Week - including the launch of a new Student and Early Careers Network, the revival of the Northamptonshire branch, and the first meeting of the newly-formed PA branch following its ratification at the NEC.

We want the union to continue

improving pay and conditions in more workplaces across the country, which is why we're excited to see our new recruitment strategy coming to life. Our vice-president Georgina Morris - who has done a brilliant job of collating views across the union - provides a full update on page 7.

# Equality

## Standing Together

**Roger McKenzie, Black Members' Council co-chair, on why we must march in hope and solidarity on 28 March.**

As the voices of division grow louder, more confident and seemingly more popular across the country, it is easy to think that all is lost and there is nothing that can be done.

It is far too easy to lose sight of the fact that there are more people of goodwill and committed to getting on with their neighbours than those intent on sowing division.

Not everyone is taken in by the false narratives that seize on the very real economic and social problems in the country in order – without any basis in reality – to scapegoat migrants, Muslims and refugees for all the nation's ills.

The far right comes forward with false solutions that sound easy but would, in reality, only make life harder for everyone.

So rather than just sit back and allow hatred and division to infect and dominate our country, many people have decided that enough is enough and that we must unite to stand up for all that is good in the knowledge that we have more in common than some would have us believe.

This was the basis of the formation of the Together Alliance, which brings together trade unionists, environmentalists, community activists, faith leaders, musicians, athletes, entertainers and elected representatives.

The Together Alliance, supported by the NUJ along with the TUC and other



Roger McKenzie, Black Members' Council co-chair

unions, believes that we can change things together.

The Alliance believes that if we stand together, we can reject narratives of division and racism. We can build solidarity across communities and unite against the far right.

NUJ members cover the many issues that face the country every day in our day jobs. We are also, of course, not just journalists. We are part of our communities.

On many occasions our members face the added complication of having to cover protests by the far right or counter protests. We must be able to carry out our work in the safest possible way. This means journalists must be able to access demonstrations without fear of reprisals for our news coverage.

Equally we must remember that many of our members, including our Black members, are targets of the far right.

We are also trade unionists and with that goes an expectation that we stand for the unity and solidarity of all workers.

The Together Alliance has called a demonstration in London on March 28. This is not a demonstration against anybody. Rather this is a celebration of unity that all of our members can take part in.

There is no reason why demonstrations need to be against anything. They can, as this one is, be about celebrating our togetherness. This is not to diminish the very real fears that many people have about the danger they face from the heightened tensions caused by the far right and politicians who pander to the tropes peddled by them.

I know what this feels like from personal experience.

I began school soon after Enoch Powell's 1968 so-called 'Rivers of Blood' speech. I remember the hatred caused by his racist comments and the abuse I had to endure because of his infamous remarks.

In recent times I feared that comments by UK prime minister Keir Starmer about people feeling like "strangers in their own land" would leave many in the same situation as I faced as a child.

But the March 28 celebration is not just about anti-racism. It is also standing up for the idea of community and also for trade unionism. These are both under attack as they represent people coming together for the common good.

Let's bring the biggest possible number of NUJ members together in London on March 28 to celebrate unity and our common good.

**[Register to join the NUJ at the Together Alliance demo on 28 March.](#)**

## Black Workers' Conference

**An NUJ delegation will attend the TUC Black Workers' Conference from 24-26 April.**

Last year saw the largest far right event in British history with 110,000 people attending the 'Unite the Kingdom' rally

amid a rapid rise in anti-immigration rhetoric.

Journalists play a critical role in challenging mis- and disinformation, with investigative reporting exposing far right groups and tactics. The NUJ's

motion calls on the TUC to promote the union's Race Reporting Guidelines and media literacy initiatives. The motion also notes the TUC's proud history of mobilising against racism and calls on the General Council to lobby government to organise a large anti-far right demonstration later in the year.

# Equality

## Taking the fight to the far right

**Alexandria Slater, NUJ campaigns & communications officer, reports from the BMC webinar.**

On 21 January the Black Members' Council held a well-attended webinar on how to respond to the threat of the far-right.

The Institute of Race Relations' (IRR) report 'In Racism's Echo Chamber' has documented widespread anti-migrant and Islamophobic violence across the UK since the 2024 general election. Within one week of the Southport stabbings in July 2024, an estimated 29 anti-immigration protests took place across 27 mostly deprived towns and cities. In September 2025 around 110,000 people attended Tommy Robinson's 'Unite the Kingdom' march – a larger rally than any held by the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in the 1930s.

Guest speakers Kudsia Batool, TUC equalities director, and Rizz Hussain, IRR deputy director, explained that these events did not happen in a vacuum nor did they materialise unexpectedly.

The far-right has been organising for decades, establishing a template for exploiting and manipulating working class anger into anti-immigration sentiment by embedding themselves into local communities. In 2014, the neo-fascist party Britain First established 'Christian Patrols' under the guise of "protecting the community" whereby activists patrolled the streets and invaded mosques in areas with large Muslim populations.

They then attempted to patrol coastal towns in the South to "defend" residents from cross-Channel migrants. In 2020, Nigel Farage encouraged his followers to participate in "citizen journalism" – described by Channel 4 as "digital vigilantism" – which involved filming visits to hotels housing asylum seekers.

In the backdrop, towns and cities were deeply damaged by austerity. The burden of government cuts fell predominately



Alexandria Slater, NUJ campaigns & communications officer

on unemployed people and low-income earners, allowing far right groups to capitalise on political disillusionment and distrust.

The far-right continues to grow with the rise of social media and, as Hussain stated, a "parliamentary race to the bottom" on issues of race, immigration and social welfare, which has seen the Overton window shift "right wing populism to the centre of mainstream politics."

Hussain explained that the 2024 riots were sustained by the "symbiotic relationship between the scale of mis- and disinformation and far right propaganda" spread on social media. The NUJ has long warned of the algorithmic amplification of hate, which Hussain echoed when noting the design and weakening of safeguards on X amplifies incitement to violence against racialised groups.

Batool characterised the NUJ's campaigning on journalists' safety, Anti-SLAAP protections, and press freedom as "crucial anti-racism work". Without the NUJ and its members, Batool argued, the far right would have even greater power to infiltrate the media discourse and further their hateful agenda.

Hussain added that trade unions have an integral role to play in the fight against the far-right - which is also a fight

for class unity – while Roger McKenzie, who chaired the webinar, encouraged attendees to "dig where you stand" and organise locally.

Batool discussed the various initiatives run by the TUC over the last year, including a national TUC led workplace focused initiative to counter division; the launch of a Save British Industry campaign; and the formalising of an anti-far right union officials' network. The TUC also recently launched its **Industrial Voices programme**, training over 400 workers to create short, authentic video content that challenges misinformation.

However, Batool stressed that "it is not the job of Black workers to deliver the solution. It is also the job of the trade union movement and our allies."

It is the duty of all journalists to counter the discrimination and disinformation that runs rife in our media and it is down to us as trade unionists to stand together in solidarity against the far right.

## Publishing reps summit

**The Newspapers and Agencies Council (NAC) hosted a national summit for reps on Saturday 14 March in Birmingham.**

Sessions focused on pay bargaining, the Employment Rights Act, recruitment, and workplace organising around AI, bringing together activists from across the publishing sector to share experiences of fighting for decent pay and conditions. Reps were also joined by colleagues from sister unions. Members from GMB discussed their landmark equal pay win, while Equity shared the organising work behind their indicative ballot for AI protections.

# Legal

## Explaining the Employment Rights Act

**Nanya Joseph, NUJ legal assistant, explains what the Employment Rights Act means for members and union activity.**

For years, the NUJ and its members have been clear about what needs to change at work: more security, fairer treatment, safer workplaces, and rules with real consequences. The Employment Rights Act became law in December 2025 and is a step forward in addressing those concerns.

The Act is being implemented in phases across 2026 and 2027. It will not change working life overnight, but it does set a new direction of travel: giving stronger rights, better enforcement and more support for collective action.

Changes introduced in February and planned for April 2026 will reshape the statutory recognition process, reducing the hurdles that have historically allowed employers to stall, frustrate, or dilute recognition attempts. Unions will no longer be required to prove that a majority of the workers in a proposed bargaining unit are likely to support recognition, removing a major evidential barrier that could be used to bog down recognition applications.

Where recognition goes to a ballot, unions will only need a simple majority of votes cast to win recognition with the former 40% support requirement removed. This change is particularly important because high thresholds can allow employers to frustrate recognition

by engineering low participation. The change refocuses the process on a straightforward democratic test: what do the workers who vote want? The Act is aimed at simplifying recognition and dealing more effectively with unfair practices during recognition and derecognition processes. Put plainly: it becomes harder to play games with the rules to block recognition, and easier for workers to secure a collective bargaining relationship.

One of the most significant changes strengthens the protection around lawful industrial action. From 18 February 2026, the law provides stronger protection from unfair dismissal during lawful strikes, meaning it will be harder for employers to intimidate people, stopping them from taking part in collective action. It will also be easier for unions to organise effectively where negotiations break down.

On 6 April 2026 statutory sick pay is set to become payable from the first day of illness instead of the fourth day, and eligibility will be widened by removing the lower earnings limit threshold. If you are unwell, the intention is that you should be able to recover without an immediate pay penalty and more people should be covered by the safety net.

Also coming into force in April 2026, the Act will introduce a new law that strengthens people's ability to balance work with family and caring

responsibilities, extending day one entitlements for leave - including paternity and unpaid parental leave.

The act also takes aim at workplace harassment. Stronger duties to prevent harassment are due to come into force in October 2026, including protections relating to third party harassment where the employer has not taken the required preventative steps.

It is also anticipated that the time limit to bring most employment tribunal claims will be extended to six months, easing the pressure on people who are dealing with stress, illness, care responsibilities, or simply the complexity of gathering evidence and seeking advice.

Looking ahead to 2027, the Act moves further on job security. Planned changes include earlier access to unfair dismissal rights - moving from two years to six months of continuous service. The Act will also introduce stronger restrictions on 'fire and rehire'. These reforms matter because they reshape the balance of power, making it harder to treat workers as disposable and easier to challenge unfairness at work.

**Please Note that this update is intended as general information only and is not legal advice. If you have concerns or questions about how these changes affect you, please contact your NUJ representative or official in the first instance.**

## Our role in shaping change

**The NUJ has played an active role in consultations with government throughout the development of reforms and continues to be a constructive voice in shaping employment legislation.**

The Employment Rights Act represents a significant step in strengthening collective voice and workplace protections. It raises the baseline for fair treatment and reinforces the value of organisation, representation,

and negotiation. It provides stronger foundations and new opportunities to secure fair results through collective action.

This is a good starting point, but there is more to be done, and the NUJ will continue to fight for greater rights and better outcomes for our members.

# Update

## Your union needs you

**Georgina Morris, NUJ vice-president, provides an update on the creation of a new recruitment and organising strategy.**

Recruiting new members into our union isn't just the job of our workplace reps and organisers, it's something we should all be doing whenever we get the chance.

More members means a stronger union – whether we're negotiating on pay, taking part in industrial action or driving change through our campaigns. It means new faces at branch meetings and extra funds in support of our activities.

It's not always easy to know where to start – and that's why our 2025 Delegate Meeting called for the creation of a new recruitment and organising strategy: a plan that would ensure our efforts were coordinated at every level of the union for maximum impact.

We're most effective as a union when we work together and the strategy being drawn up as you read this has taken that approach from the start.

Every chapel rep, branch, council and committee across our union was invited to contribute to our recruitment and organising consultation. What was working well for them that others should try? What were the obstacles that we could try to remove? What new ideas did they have?

None of us has all the answers but everyone who's taken part had pieces of the puzzle to offer. Each conversation – including those with our organisers and staff – has provided useful insight or suggestions.

Themes have begun to emerge, starting with how we can improve the process of joining our union. Even while work on the wider strategy has been taking place, we've been able to make a start on some of this.

We've refreshed the Join pages of the website to make sure we more clearly and simply set out the benefits of membership, who can join, the types of

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Georgina Morris, NUJ vice-president.

**ORGANISING  
DEFENDING  
WINNING**

membership available and what it costs.

Next will be the addition of FAQs that answer some of the most common membership questions from applicants and existing members, and a review of our online application form.

Once members join, can we be doing more to welcome them into union life? The first of our new member induction workshops took place on 17 February, with more than 40 new members signing up to learn about how the NUJ works and how they can get involved.

Our new Student & Early Careers Network – launched during Heart Unions Week – will be a focal point for members starting out in their careers, with their views helping to shape how we recruit the next generation of activists.

Our branches have a crucial role to play in welcoming in these new members too, providing a connection to the NUJ where they live. It's why the first of our new monthly sessions for branch committee members focused on how to run inclusive meetings.

There's plenty more to be done to maximise our recruiting and organising across the union, but the new strategy will serve as our guide as we work towards ensuring every member has the knowledge and tools they need to inspire others to join us.

Some of the changes needed will take longer to put in place. They'll involve modernising our structures and ways of working, or updating elements of our rulebook when members come together at the 2027 Delegate Meeting.

But with everyone doing their bit, we can make sure the NUJ is a union that looks confidently towards the future.

[Download recruitment resources from our website.](#)

[Want to share your recruitment challenges or success story? Contact campaigns@nuj.org.uk.](#)

## Freelance updates

**The updated NUJ *Freelance Fact Pack* provides freelance members with useful information on a number of topics including finding work, paying tax, legal issues, and getting support and training.**

The pack includes sections on union support, setting up a freelance business, and advice on negotiating contracts, payment rates and pensions.

On Saturday 21 March the Dublin Freelance branch will host the **Spring 2026 Freelance Forum**, a one-day event to keep freelance journalists up-to-date with the latest developments in their industry. Held at the Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin, the event is aimed at PR practitioners, photographers and writers working across print, broadcast and online media.

# Spotlight

Jess Hurd



## Police target Vincent Kearney's family

**Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, reflects on the Investigatory Powers Tribunal hearing into state surveillance of Vincent Kearney.**

**Vincent Kearney's wife, Louise Kearney, sat in the front row of the public gallery, flanked by the BBC's Northern Ireland director and representatives of the National Union of Journalists.**

President of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal Lady Carmichael, Vice President Lord Boyd of Duncansby, and Stephen Shaw KC remained inscrutable as Jude Bunting KC, representing Vincent, revealed the shocking extent of the unlawful police intrusion into the privacy of Louise Kearney and her mother, as well as the illegal surveillance by security forces of one of Northern Ireland's most experienced and respected journalists.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland

(PSNI) and MI5 have admitted that their actions were unlawful.

Like most journalists Vincent Kearney is more comfortable breaking stories than making headlines.

Kearney is currently Northern Ireland editor of RTÉ and a member of Belfast and District branch of the NUJ. He was appointed home affairs correspondent with the BBC in Belfast in April 2006, a role he held until 2019.

Arriving at the grand Royal Courts of Justice in London on the morning the three-day hearing was to begin, Vincent soon found himself surrounded by reporters and photographers. Welcomed by Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, he posed in front of the cameras with the slogan "Journalism is Not a Crime" – a message that echoed throughout the public section of the hearing.

Louise Kearney is a private citizen yet her personal details were systematically collected as part of a "long and consistent campaign of unlawful interference" by the PSNI, MI5 and others between 2006 and 2014.

In one operation against Vincent, police amassed information relating to 1,580 calls or texts the NUJ member made and received, while its profile on him contained details about his family, phone numbers, car registration numbers and who was residing at his family home.

It's hard to imagine a more intrusive exercise directed at a journalist and their family.

The sole objective of the actions was to identify Vincent's journalistic sources, yet records show that Kearney was referred to as a "suspect" in a criminal investigation.

The PSNI may have admitted unlawful actions, but no apology has been forthcoming, and it is objecting to the claim for damages lodged by Kearney and the BBC.

At the hearing, Cathryn McGahey KC, for the PSNI, said the force had made "a number of clear and extensive

concessions." The force did not object to the tribunal ruling that the PSNI breached Kearney and the BBC's rights, she said, but it opposed the awarding of damages as it would be unnecessary "to award just satisfaction".

The PSNI concession, she argued, was sufficient in and of itself.

Questioned on the description of Vincent Kearney as a "suspect" in a criminal investigation, McGahey said that description was wrong and should not have been used. It was, she said, "a clumsy description."

Clumsy is a word normally associated with an unfortunate and usually inconsequential accident, such as spilling a cup of coffee on a charge sheet or stepping into a puddle of water on the way to court.

Labelling a respected journalist as a "suspect" was more than just clumsy. Vincent Kearney was not a suspect. His contacts were not criminal. Journalism is not a crime. Being married to a journalist does not mean you must surrender your right to privacy.

The PSNI said that the relevant legal framework at the time Kearney's rights were violated was later held to be inadequate in cases involving journalistic material and their counsel said, "lessons had been learned".

Kearney's counsel told the IPT there were seven separate police or MI5 operations in which communications data was unlawfully acquired over a period of more than ten years.

Information obtained included phone billing data and "subscriber names and address details" in respect of the numbers that had contacted Kearney.

The IPT does not therefore have to determine whether Kearney's rights were breached by MI5 but must decide what, if any, damages are to be awarded and if the BBC, his then employer, is also the victim of unlawful interferences of journalistic material by MI5. Its decision will be given later in the year.

The Metropolitan Police has also admitted unlawfully obtaining Kearney's

data twice in 2012 and now we know that he was the target of unlawful surveillance by the PSNI between 2009 and 2014.

In relation to the PSNI, Bunting pointed out that the revelations only emerged because of the separate IPT case involving state surveillance taken by NUJ members Trevor Birney and Barry McCaffrey. It was an "accidental" discovery and over a long period Vincent and his family were unaware of the unlawful accessing of data by the police forces.

Bunting said the PSNI had displayed "an unhealthy" interest in journalists over many years. He also stressed the impact of surveillance on Kearney's professional and personal life, on his ability to do his job, on his reputation and on his relationship with sources.

In submissions Kearney said the snooping authorisations were "self-evidently not isolated events."

"They reveal a systematic and years-long pattern of accessing my journalistic sources and mapping my professional activity," he said. "I am not aware of any other journalist in the UK or Ireland who has been targeted in such a sustained way over so many years."

As Vincent made clear prior to the hearing, the unlawful surveillance against him and his family not only took a personal toll, it also severely undermined the basic democratic principles of media freedom and the right to report. He said: "These activities were not just an attack on me and my journalism, but also the journalism of the BBC and on public interest journalism itself. Journalists must be free to pursue their lawful duties without fear of illegal efforts by the state to drive a coach and horses through source confidentiality, which is an essential journalistic tenet."

Adam Smyth, BBC Northern Ireland director, issued a clear message as he arrived in court. "The independence of the BBC is hard won and we will stop at no lengths to defend our journalism.

What happened to Vincent Kearney was

completely wrong. He was treated as a suspect, not as a journalist. His rights as a journalist were not respected."

On arrival Smyth joined Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, in a symbolic joint gesture of solidarity with Vincent. Speaking to BBC News NI outside the court, Davison said: "Journalists have to be free to do their work in the public interest and we need to know what's happened here."

"We need to know whether it's impacted other colleagues within the BBC. There has to be clear accountability and transparency in terms of what's taken place. We're calling for there to be a full public inquiry into surveillance of journalists in Northern Ireland, that has to be what comes out of this."

In a statement, RTÉ similarly described the data access breaches as "deeply concerning".

"Any deliberate circumventing of long-established legal protections of journalists and their sources damages trust in media and ultimately our democracy," Deirdre McCarthy, RTÉ News and Current Affairs managing director, said.

Kevin Cooper, Belfast & District branch vice chair, said: "Journalism is not a crime and the British state, police and agencies have no right interfering with journalists going about their lawful business and doing their jobs on behalf of the public."

Fran McNulty, NUJ joint president, remarked that "all journalists must be able to pursue stories, investigate issues and engage with sources without any fear of surveillance and intrusion by the state."

"What has been uncovered in Vincent's case is of the utmost concern," added McNulty, who said Kearney will have the "NUJ's unwavering support".

Following the hearing, the NUJ renewed its call for a judge-led inquiry to investigate the full extent of systemic, unlawful surveillance against journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders in Northern Ireland - not only by PSNI but also other police and security services across the UK.

# Campaign

## MPs call for checks on big tech

**Regulation and taxation of big tech companies is needed urgently to deal with a near monopoly in local media and a new digital world that “generates toxicity”, as several MPs have argued.**

In a debate on the issue held at Westminster Hall, John McDonnell, MP for Hayes and Harlington and NUJ parliamentary group secretary, pointed out that around 300 local papers have closed since 2005, leaving an estimated 5.4 million people in local news deserts.

“We’re almost in a monopoly situation now”, he said, explaining that Newsquest, National World and Reach now “cover 51% of the local papers. It’s even worse in DAB radio; it’s two thirds-controlled by Bauer and Global – 60% of the analogue as well.”

Meanwhile the tech companies “have made about £15 billion pounds worth of profits”, much of which has come from the UK.

McDonnell said, “regulation needs to be looked at” and backed the NUJ’s News Recovery Plan, which suggests a 25% limit cap on how much is owned by any particular corporation and new models of ownership.

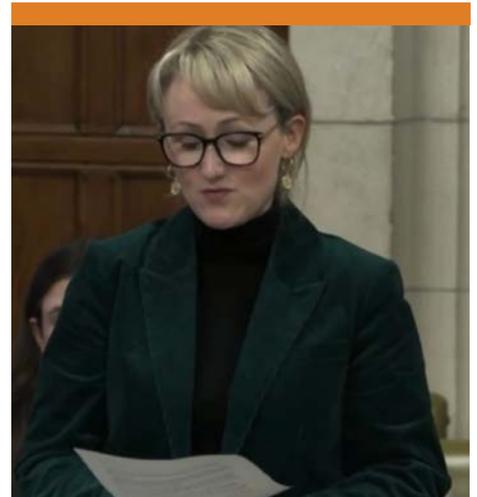
McDonnell also praised the BBC Local Democracy Reporter scheme, but warned that it is “being exploited now” by publishers who are making journalists do work other than local reporting.

“It’s time for a reset,” said Rebecca Long-Bailey, MP for Salford and NUJ parliamentary group chair.



Long-Bailey highlighted the union’s key calls, urging the government to: reform media ownership rules with a strengthened public interest tests; establish a Journalism Foundation to support new media and invest in public interest journalism; introduce a 6% windfall tax on tech giants to be reinvested into local journalism; designate local papers as assets of community value; and retain public notice requirements protecting a vital revenue stream and a vital democratic function.

Alison Hume, MP for Scarborough and Whitby, voiced further opposition over plans to scrap alcohol licensing notices. “The National Union of Journalists has highlighted that for the digitally-excluded, local platforms remain their main source of news,” Hume explained.



“One local editor put it plainly, denuding print audiences of the right to know what is happening in their community does not feel like community empowerment.”

Rachael Maskell, MP for York Central, called for serious legislation to be introduced urgently to combat the “unfiltered, biased content” and “toxicity” spreading online in the age of social media, as tech giants profiteer “at the expense of local journalism”.

Maskell continued: “As we navigate this new world of fact and fake, we must ensure that the route out is through our local media outlets, so we can hold on to authenticity and rebuild trust.”

Both Long-Bailey and McDonnell ended by recommending the various practical interventions in the NUJ’s News Recovery Plan as a way of revitalising the local media industry.

### Worker representation at the BBC

The NUJ parliamentary group was also active in raising members’ demands for the next Royal Charter to guarantee the BBC’s sustainable funding, political

independence and universal accessibility in a Westminster debate in January. “The BBC must remain universal and it must serve everyone,” said Rebecca Long-Bailey. “Public service broadcasting works only when it is genuinely

public, and universality must be protected through a funding model that is fair, sufficient and free from political interference.” Long-Bailey highlighted the particular need to restore long-term, secure funding for the World

Service. John McDonnell meanwhile championed the NUJ’s call for significant governance reform. “We have been arguing for years that there should be at least 25% worker representation on the board,” he said.

# Update

## TUC Women's Conference 2026

**Held in Bournemouth from 4-6 March, the TUC Women's Conference focused on the role of trade unions in resisting misogyny and the rise of the far right.**

The NUJ delegation was Ann Galpin, Georgina Morris, Natasha Hirst, and Sara Lewis.

The delegation sent a clear message that racist political rhetoric, social media commentary and reporting harm women, normalise discrimination, and place journalists covering anti-immigration rallies at risk.

Natasha Hirst, NUJ Equality Council co-chair, moved the NUJ's composited motion highlighting the harm caused to women by far right, racist and sexist rhetoric

Hirst emphasised the role of ethical reporting in countering narratives that scapegoat marginalised communities, noting the particular threats posed by the far right through online harassment and targeted abuse at rallies.

"As journalists and communications professionals, we bear a responsibility to shape positive and inclusive narratives and to scrutinise and challenge attempts to undermine the rights and safety of women and girls," said Hirst. "There has never been a time when plurality of viewpoints in the media has been so crucial."

The composite motion carried unanimously and was selected to go to the TUC Congress in Brighton in September.

On the second day of conference, the NUJ joined a Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (TUCG) fringe event alongside the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU), Prison Officers' Association (POA), The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), and University and College Union (UCU).

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, opened the discussion by introducing the NUJ's Journalists' Safety Tracker, which allows journalists to report intimidation, abuse and lawfare including Strategic



Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

"It's clear that journalists are the target of shocking abuse and harassment both online and in person, and this restricts their ability to carry out their work," said Davison as she revealed that women journalists were targeted with violent, graphic abuse with some reporting daily rape and death threats. Davison acknowledged that taking time to report incidents can be an additional burden – "particularly in newsrooms where resources have been hollowed out over the years."

The event closed with delegates emphasising the importance of tools like the Safety Tracker that allow workers to safely report abuse.

In the main conference hall Georgina Morris, NUJ vice president, highlighted the union's calls for urgent regulatory oversight of artificial intelligence amid exposure to digital violence and deepfake pornography.

"Our members working in social media roles are exposed to this hateful rhetoric on a daily basis, facing the unenviable task of wading through comment sections on platforms that have allowed harmful content to flourish," said Morris.

"Employers have a legal duty to protect us from all these harms, but too many have no effective procedures or support systems in place."

Later that day Sara Lewis, Equality Council vice-chair, highlighted the inequalities faced by freelancers and self-employed creative workers. Noting that women were much more likely to choose self-employed work because of caring commitments, Lewis said: "Although we are our own bosses in theory, in practice there is a massive power imbalance – which is why it's so important that the trades union movement understands and is responsive to the needs of self-employed workers."

On the final day of conference, delegates backed motions on supporting carers in the workplace, health and safety, and reproductive justice.

Reflecting on the three days, Ann Galpin, Disabled Members' Council co-chair, said: "As an NUJ rep on the TUC Disabled Workers' Committee, it's a really good opportunity to see the similarities in issues that are affecting women and disabled workers so an intersectional lens is really important."

The NUJ marked International Women's Day on 8 March by celebrating the commitment and courage of women journalists around the world despite ongoing disparities in treatment and opportunity.

Last year the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism revealed that only a quarter of the top editors across the 240 titles covered are women – an imbalance that shapes editorial decision-making and the framing of public narratives.

"The NUJ will always put the safety, equality and dignity of women journalists at the heart of our work," said Davison. "From backing motions to end violence against women and girls to demanding real action to close the gender pay gap, we will continue to stand up for women across our industry."

# International

## IFJ Killed List 2025

*Awil Mohamoud, campaigns and communications officer, on the publication of the 2025 IFJ Killed List.*

**It's one of the most dangerous times to work as a journalist and the principle of press freedom is under serious attack around the world.**

Annual figures published by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) show that 128 journalists and media workers were killed in 2025. A similar number - 122 - was recorded the previous year.

Despite journalists' status as civilians under international law, the IFJ noted a high concentration of deaths in conflict zones. Almost half of the deaths in 2025 were in Gaza, with 56 Palestinian journalists and media workers killed by Israeli forces. This includes, in August, the emblematic killing of five Al-Jazeera journalists and a freelance photojournalist in an airstrike close to Al Shifa Hospital. In the days and weeks that followed, our members organised powerful vigils and protests to show solidarity with fallen colleagues and call for accountability. Since these figures were published on 31 December, another three freelance journalists have been killed by Israeli airstrikes in Gaza.

Yemen ranked second on the IFJ list with 13 journalists killed, followed by Ukraine with eight. Sudan accounted for six of the ten deaths reported across Africa, with journalists reporting on the civil war specifically targeted by warring factions, particularly the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). India and Peru recorded the killing of four journalists, and several other countries - including the Philippines, Mexico and Pakistan - reported three.

Since 1990 and the launch of its annual Killed List, the IFJ has recorded 3,173 deaths worldwide, an average of 91 deaths per year.

Eesha Iftikhar Qazi/IFJ



The NUJ has joined the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in urging governments to finally end clear violations of international law and to support a specific and binding UN Convention on the safety and protection of journalists. As Anthony Bellanger, IFJ general secretary, has made clear, this law would "place a requirement on states to protect journalists in all circumstances, investigate every crime, and prosecute the perpetrators, whoever they are."

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, said: "Journalists around the world are on the frontline in defending press freedom and upholding truth. Many have been killed while reporting from conflict zones [...] and we owe all those colleagues an enormous collective debt and express our deep condolences to their families."

The IFJ report also revealed a sobering

Journalists working in conflict and disaster zones around the world need your help. The IFJ is supplying vital equipment and aid. Please donate to its safety fund. Branches can email [jackiec@nuj.org](mailto:jackiec@nuj.org) to transfer funds from their management allowances.

**DONATE NOW**

picture globally in relation to journalists' freedom to report with 533 journalists jailed at the end of 2025. The Asia-Pacific region continues to imprison the largest number of journalists for their work, with 277 currently behind bars, including 143 in China, 49 in Myanmar and 37 in Vietnam.

Attacks on press freedom have continued into 2026. Hong Kong media magnate, Jimmy Lai, was recently sentenced to 20-years in prison following a politically-motivated conviction to silence free speech. In Venezuela, 14 journalists were arbitrarily detained following the US military attack on the country and in the Philippines, journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio, was convicted on baseless charges of "financing terrorism". Meanwhile, there have been further reports of systematic targeting of UK-based Persian journalists by Iranian authorities.

The issue of press freedom has also been a concern in the UK and Ireland. The McCullough Review in 2025, held partly due to pressure from the NUJ and others, helped expose the unlawful surveillance of Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). In February of this year, a tribunal heard of similar unlawful surveillance against former BBC journalist and NUJ member Vincent Kearney. Reports also recently emerged of the thinktank Labour Together hiring a commercial firm to investigate journalists who were probing irregularities in the organisation's funding.

Meanwhile data from the NUJ Journalists' Safety Tracker reveals shocking abuse, harassment, and intimidation, both online and in-person, against journalists. It highlights the urgent need for coordinated action, including from government and tech companies, to protect the rights of journalists and their freedom to report.

The NUJ continues to spread awareness of these abuses nationally and globally alongside the IFJ, calling for governments to uphold journalists' right to do their job without fear of retaliation.