COME FLY WITH ME

March of the media drones
While journalists in most media sectors are struggling to survive the constant threats to the future of our industry, their representatives from branches across the NUJ have been meeting to ensure that the union will continue to be there to help when things are tough.

Debates at the union’s delegate meeting in Newcastle were sometimes fiercely argued, but there was widespread agreement on all sides that this is a time for NUJ members to work together to protect and develop our union. This issue of The Journalist brings you a taste of those debates. Why not attend your next union branch meeting for a full report from your delegates to the conference?

Meanwhile, Phil Chamberlain has been looking at the impact of unmanned aviation devices on photography and image capture. Samuel Johnson observed that only a blockhead would write other than for money. So what are blogheads up to? Veteran blogger Jonathan Slattery unravels the attractions.

After 40 years as a reporter in the same part of Yorkshire Pete Lazenby offers some advice to those starting off in the trade. For those whose careers have led them into areas of conflict abroad, James Rodgers reflects on what reporting from a modern war zone is all about.

In addition, we’ve our usual regular features, letters pages and six pages of news to complete this edition of The Journalist.
I’m so glad I’m in the NUJ, says sacked Sun man

The Sun newspaper’s highly respected former features editor Matt Nixson has thanked the NUJ for what he called its ‘phenomenal support’ after settling his wrongful dismissal case.

An NUJ member for 13 years, Matt was sacked more than a year ago on the orders of News Corporation’s Management and Standards Committee (MSC).

He was not told the reason for his dismissal for nearly five months, until it was alleged that while at the News of the World he had sanctioned a payment of £750 to a prison officer for a story about Soham killer Ian Huntley. Matt vehemently denied the allegation and the police quickly declared they had no interest in pursuing it.

With the help of the NUJ he launched legal action against News International.

Unlike the 20 Sun journalists arrested over the last year who have kept their jobs, Matt has been unable to work in the newspaper industry because of the shadow cast over his character.

Matt, 38, who formerly worked for the Mail on Sunday, Brighton Argus and Hendon Express, Finchley Times, said: “I’m absolutely delighted that my case has been settled and incredibly grateful to the NUJ which has stood right behind me from day one.

“The level of support was truly phenomenal – both financially and emotionally – and a number of officials, including Barry Fitzpatrick, Michelle Stanistreet and Fiona Swarbrick and the legal team Roy Mincoff and Natasha Morris among others, have gone above and beyond the call of duty, as well as a number of brilliant administrative workers.

“My family and I are incredibly grateful to everyone at Headland House. I’m just relieved I was a member of the NUJ. I’m hoping I can now pick up my career and get back into newspapers.”

NUJ deputy general secretary Barry Fitzpatrick said: “We are delighted we have settled Matt’s case. It has been a very difficult ordeal for him and his family. The details of the settlement are confidential.

NUJ legal officer Roy Mincoff added that it had been a long battle in very trying circumstances for Matt.

Police service demands Belfast riot footage

Undeterred by the NUJ’s high court victory in the Dale Farm case, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is seeking all media footage and photographs from the riots in north Belfast this summer.

It has emerged that masked rioters uncovered themselves for smoke and drink breaks. Police disclosed the slip-up as lawyers for the PSNI requested a full production order for unbroadcast material and photographs taken during the disorder on July 12 in the Ardoyne area.

The BBC, Ulster TV, Sky News and the Press Association resisted the application which was heard at the Recorders Court in Belfast.

The MURODCH FAMILY

Stripping test

The NUJ tore into managers at the Sun for asking a female intern to strip for a mock-up of a picture of the naked Prince Harry cavorting in Las Vegas.

While the 21-year-old trainee said she was not forced to do it, she shouldn’t have been asked in the first place, said NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet.

“Expecting an intern – someone who’s keen to make an impression and secure a job in an incredibly competitive industry – to pose naked is utterly crass and inappropriate. I somehow doubt a young member of the Murdoch family on work experience would be expected to get their kit off. It’s a new low for News International.

This kind of workplace culture has got to be consigned to the past.” The Sun subsequently became the only UK paper to defy a PCC warning and publish the nude pictures of Prince Harry.

EX-SUN EDITOR DEMANDS CASH

South Yorkshire Police is resisting court action by ex Sun editor Kelvin MacKenzie demanding an ‘apology and recompense’ for ‘personal vilification’ following his paper’s coverage of the Hillsborough disaster.

MacKenzie apologised after an independent panel found there was no evidence for the Sun’s serious allegations against Liverpool fans.

CELEBRITY LIBEL CLAIMS PLUMMET

Defamation cases involving celebrities have dropped to a five-year low in the wake of the Leveson Inquiry. There were only seven libel cases over the last year, according to figures from Sweet & Maxwell, including Sven-Göran Eriksson’s ex-partner Nancy Dell’Olio, former Smiths frontman Morrissey and Welsh singer Charlotte Church.

JUDGE ALLOWS AFFAIR STORY

Former England manager Steve McClaren failed to stop a Sun story about his extra-marital affair with Saima Aransi, ex-lover of Sven Goran Eriksson.

The paper said it was a balancing act between laws on privacy and freedom of expression “and in this case the judge came down on our side”.

GUARDIAN PAPER’S MURDOCH RIVAL

The Sunday Times reports that its owner News Corp is looking to launch a rival to Auto Trader which it describes as Guardian Media Group’s ‘last remaining cash cow’. The Guardian’s phone hacking investigation has severely undermined News Corp’s global reputation.

MOST READ BUT LEAST TRUSTED

A study of ‘opinion formers’ and the general public by communications consultancy Open Road and researchers Populus found that the most read newspaper in the UK – the Sun – is also the least trusted. Least trusted overall was the Tory blogger Guido Fawkes.

NEWS CORPORATION

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BBC and ITV members prepare for cuts action

Members at the BBC are angry at the massive impact of the 20 per cent cuts agreed by former director general Mark Thompson

BBC and ITV members are preparing to take industrial action before Christmas over cuts to broadcasting jobs and threats to terms and conditions.

Staff at the corporation are due to ballot within the next few weeks and it is hoped there will be a result by early to mid-December. The NUJ’s national executive has also given the go-ahead for a vote on action at ITV.

Members at the BBC are angry at the massive impact of the 20 per cent cuts agreed by former director general Mark Thompson which the union believes were made under pressure from Rupert Murdoch.

NUJ broadcasting organiser Sue Harris warned the NUJ delegate meeting in Newcastle in October that Thompson’s successor George Entwistle showed no more enthusiasm for protecting the corporation.

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A plan to introduce inferior terms and conditions for new BBC recruits – including an attempt to halve redundancy payments – amounted to a ‘Trojan Horse’, she said.

In Scotland members expressed anxiety about continuing job cuts, and the delegate meeting resolved to oppose compulsory redundancies.

The conference called for an immediate moratorium on any further cutbacks until after the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the completion of the Scottish independence referendum. The NUJ has registered an official dispute over ‘intimidation’ during the redundancy selection process.

Elsewhere the workforce at the BBC’s Asian Network is set to be halved as it is relocated from its birthplace in Leicester to London – in contrast to management’s plan to make the corporation look less London-centric.

Pierre Vicary, chair of the NUJ Broadcasting Industrial Council, told conference delegates that despite being a BBC man he was speaking to support his ITV colleagues in a motion which opposed cuts to regional newsrooms ‘which are already overstretched and under-resourced’.

BY LINE BANDITRY

Men continue to dominate the bylines on front page stories in national newspapers – especially in the so-called liberal press. And 84 per cent of those quoted or mentioned by name in all such stories were men, a study by Women in Journalism found.

Covering the period from April 16 to May 13, the survey discovered that the avowedly right-wing Daily Express was the title with the most female bylines with a 50/50 split.

The leftish Guardian came out with a meagre 22 per cent and the centrist Independent on a negligible 9 per cent. Even the illiberal Daily Mail was ahead with 24 per cent.

Others were: Daily Mirror 21 per cent, Financial Times 33 per cent, Sun and Times both 18 per cent and Daily Telegraph 14 per cent.

Strike threat wins pay rise

A strike threat won a salary increase for journalists employed by the non-TUC Royal College of Nursing, which had been insisting on a pay freeze. The rest of the RCN’s staff had been offered a 1.5 per cent rise – the first time journalists had been offered less.

NUJ members on the Nursing Standard and other RCN journals voted in favour of walkouts and industrial action short of strikes.

After prolonged talks at Acas, the NUJ chapel won a one per cent increase, an unconsolidated bonus of 0.2 per cent and the promise of “meaningful negotiations” in future. NUJ organiser Fiona Swarbrick said: “It shows what can be done when a chapel sticks together.”
Regional newspaper groups are trying to undercut wages by recruiting ‘non-journalists’ to do journalistic work at lower pay rates.

The scam is increasingly being used by Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press and Archant, says NUJ deputy general secretary Barry Fitzpatrick.

And Barry warned: “It is one of the most serious threats to the quality of content throughout the regional press and puts at risk the professional integrity that trained journalists provide. If introduced without safeguards it will further undermine the value of journalism.”

Trinity is understood to have deleted any applications from qualified journalists for jobs as ‘multi-media assistants’ in an attempt to ensure they will not have to do journalists’ jobs.

The vacancies on regional titles advertised the pay rates.

Northern and Midlands organiser Chris Morley said the new employees were to be paid below the level of a trainee journalist.

“These so-called assistants are absolutely entitled and would be encouraged to join the NUJ but the company is saying they are not part of the bargaining structure.

“As it happens, we are in talks with the company over the house agreement. We are hopeful management will see sense and include them in the bargaining group.”

Chris added: “This is a tactic by management that is just getting journalistic work done on the cheap.”

More means less in libel cases

The media’s extreme caution in running potentially libellous stories is expected to ease after a key decision on damages by the Lord Chief Justice.

Lord Judge announced that legal damages are to be increased from April 2013 by 10 per cent, including those damages provided for defamation and breach of privacy.

But errant publishers could pay much lower legal bills. Lord Judge also declared that ‘success fees’ and insurance premiums under no-win no-fee agreements are to be paid out of the claimant’s damages rather than by the losing defendant.

The deadline for the current round of funding for mental health investigations – with a maximum individual payment of €18,000 – is November 16.

Investigations have to be increased from April 2013 by 10 per cent last year.

‘Non-journalists’ sought to do journalists’ jobs

The NUJ chapel in Liverpool is understood to have deleted any applications from qualified journalists for jobs as ‘multi-media assistants’ in an attempt to ensure they will not have to do journalists’ jobs.

The company expects the new recruits to ‘gather and prepare content’ but are insisting the jobs are not for journalists.

Management at the Liverpool Echo and its weekly sister titles advertised the posts as ‘administrative’.

The NUJ chapel in Liverpool says the jobs should be recognised as journalistic ones so they can be included in collective bargaining.

The vacancies on regional newspaper offices, in Southport, Widnes and Liverpool at salaries of between £13,400 and £15,000.

The company said it could not have got the rate for the job.

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Mary, who died of cancer earlier this year, exposed horrific child abuse in church-run institutions in RTE programmes such as ‘States of Fear’ and ‘Cardinal Secrets’.

Sponsored for the next year by the Dublin-based One Foundation, the fund will promote in-depth coverage in Ireland of issues like mental health, migration and children’s rights.

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NUJ demands win all-out backing from TUC unions

The NUJ won unanimous backing from the rest of the 6.5million strong union movement for its demand for a conscience clause for journalists and changes to press regulation.

All delegates at the TUC’s annual congress in Brighton also endorsed the union’s plea to the BBC’s new director general to draw up a new plan for the future of the corporation.

The conference was told how the Leveson Inquiry heard witness after witness speaking of ‘practices perpetrated by a powerful media that had come to think of itself as above the law’.

Chris Frost, chair of the NUJ’s ethics council, told delegates that bullying in newsrooms, especially the national press, was rife. He said the NUJ gave evidence to Leveson on behalf of a number of journalists too scared for their jobs to appear in person. “The Daily Mail tried to obtain a High Court order to prevent these journalists being able to give anonymous evidence. Fortunately even the courts realised the importance of hearing from those too scared or embarrassed to tell their story in person.”

He said the NUJ was seeking a conscience clause so that journalists can refuse assignments that would require them to act unethically without risk to their jobs.

Professor Frost, head of journalism at Liverpool John Moores University, called for a change to the system of press regulation so that all stakeholders, proprietors and editors and also the public and journalists have a role.

He said the country needed ‘a fair regulatory system that puts press freedom as its number one priority but with fair and accurate coverage of British and international affairs a close second’.

NUJ president Donnacha DeLong (pictured) told congress the BBC was under sustained attack. He said Rupert Murdoch and the Murdoch family were behind the deal struck behind closed doors which led to the BBC’s licence fee being frozen and 20 per cent cuts.

The NUJ gave evidence to Leveson on behalf of a number of journalists too scared for their jobs to appear in person

Claim your share of £3m

The Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS) has a share of over £3 million in payback royalties for NUJ members whose work has been reproduced in UK books and magazines or broadcast on certain UK television channels.

Last year the average royalty payment made to an NUJ member was £655 and the highest payment was £4,150. Anyone who makes a successful ‘Payback’ claim is guaranteed a minimum of £25.

Royalties come from revenue generated through various UK collective licensing schemes and include the photocopying of books and magazines by local government departments, universities and other businesses. DACS negotiates a share of this revenue which it distributes each year through Payback.

NUJ members have until October 31 to claim their share. The easiest way to claim is to fill in a form online at www.dacs.org.uk/for-artists/payback. Or members can request a paper form by contacting DACS on 020 7553 9099 or payback@dacs.org.uk.
Sign up for pensions now before new rules kick in

Members are being urged to give immediate consideration to joining company pension schemes which include employer contributions before new legislation comes into place.

The ground-breaking law has both dangers and opportunities for members, according to an important briefing sent to chapels.

In a staged process from this month employees will be automatically enrolled into workplace pensions. Under the new rules individuals have to ‘opt out’ rather than ‘opt in’ as they used to. But if they opt out it means their employers are absolved of paying them ‘wages’ when they retire – or pensions by another name.

Opting out means they will forfeit employer contributions to their pensions which can be as much as seven per cent of their salary.

NUJ deputy general secretary Barry Fitzpatrick says the new law gives the union a great opportunity to develop and enhance benefits for all workers.

But he warned that it could also mean lower payouts in retirement for those new to a company scheme. Employers will have to pay more into pension pots because of a likely higher take-up. So they may be tempted to lower their contributions to the initial legal minimum of one per cent of a new joiners’ pay which would result in worse pensions.

Barry said: “Our members often think pensions are unaffordable and untrustworthy. Employers save millions of pounds because of that attitude. It’s money that should be going to our members.

“It can’t be said too often: pensions are deferred wages. The new law gives us a unique opportunity to make sure our members get decent pensions – and attract non-members. But we also urge people to consider joining existing schemes immediately before employers are tempted to undermine them – even though we will resist such moves.”

The union is urging members to become pensions reps. One of their roles will be to be vigilant over ‘administration fees’ which can literally halve ‘deferred wages’.

For a full briefing see nuj.org.uk/files/workplace_pensions_pensions_auto-enrolment_briefing.pdf

A load of old cucumbers

The equivalent in the German language is the ‘pickled cucumber season’. In Slovene it is similar.

In England in the 1800s tailors referred to it as ‘cucumber time’. For British and Irish journalists it is the ‘silly season’: that time of year when stories dry up and reporters find themselves writing, well, a load of old cucumbers.

David Clarke, a former journalist at the Yorkshire Post, now a senior lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, is studying the ‘folklore’ of the journalistic silly season and wants to hear all your anecdotes.

The NUJ condemned a Loyalist death threat against an un-named member in Belfast. The union has appealed to politicians and others who may have influence with the UDA to have the threat withdrawn.

The UDA denied any involvement, but the NUJ’s Irish secretary Seamus Dooley said it was part of a ‘sinister campaign’ against the journalist.

Lizzy Dive makes a twit of herself

The Cornishman carried an apology after a complaint to the PCC. “Following our article of June 21 which reported Lizzy Dive, an actress who was playing Mrs Twit on stage, had sustained mild concussion from being hit by a kettle, we are happy to make clear that Ms Dive did not suffer concussion, but only minor bruising.”

Newspaper groups win TV licences

Archant and Trinity Mirror were among the winners of licences to run local TV channels. Archant will run Mustard TV in Norwich, while Made TV and Trinity Mirror will broadcast in Cardiff. Made TV and the South West News Service will cover Bristol.

New edition for seaside town

The Daily Grimsby Telegraph has launched a new Cleethorpes and Villages edition aimed at providing enhanced coverage of the North Lincolnshire seaside town. One reporter has been dedicated to the edition.
Members at Newsquest take action over pay

Our members have had enough of Newsquest’s pleas of poverty while its directors pocket huge bonuses

Johnston relaunches delayed

Members at Newsquest have decided to offer a pay rise this year.

Chapels in Essex North, York and Bradford have all held mandatory meetings in protest at yet another freeze on salaries.

A Newsquest decision to award a two per cent rise to members of the Darlington chapel — albeit delayed by three months from the due date of January 1 — was regarded as deliberately divisive. Earlier this year a salary review was promised to all Newsquest journalists who — apart from those at Darlington — have endured a pay freeze for three years out of four.

Bradford FoC Bob Smith pointed out that the company locally made pre-tax profits of £1.87m last year. “Group directors were rewarded with performance-related pay totalling £268,000 at a time when editorial bosses tell us our company is not hitting financial targets,” he said.

“It’s time for Newsquest to stop punishing its staff and start investing in its most valuable asset: the journalists who create the content without which there is no business.”

Joint Fathers of the York Newsquest Chapel Mark Steed and Tony Kelly said: “Our members have had enough of Newsquest’s pleas of poverty while directors pocket huge bonuses and profits are siphoned off to American shareholders.”

They said the chapel remained willing to reach an agreement, but were committed to taking industrial action when necessary.

Northern and Midlands organiser Chris Morley said the disputes were the tip of the iceberg of discontent within Newsquest over the “appallingly callous attitude” of senior managers to staff.

The company is scrapping another subbing hub. Job losses are feared at the Lancashire Evening Post’s office in Preston over plans to axe the subbing unit there and move the work 80 miles away to Sheffield.

Concerns over further cutbacks mounted as the group announced on 8.7 per cent drop in year-on-year operating profit to £30.4m for the first six months of 2012. Pre-tax profits almost halved to just over £8m.

Johnston Press regional newspaper portfolio is being delayed.

Chief executive Ashley Highfield has admitted that some of the feedback to management was ‘not so good’. He is pushing ahead with his ‘digital first’ strategy and relaunching 170 paid-for titles, switching some dailies to weeklies amid widespread job losses.

The planned relaunch of the huge Johnston Press regional newspaper portfolio is being delayed.

Highfield’s platform-neutral rodents — Page 11
There’s no fog on the Tyne

As ever, the NUJ’s delegate meeting was a lively gathering and there was no shortage of debate and strong views, as members from across the UK and Ireland gathered to tackle the problems facing the union and come up with a collective way forward.

Key decisions were taken, including agreeing the need for a 5 per cent subs increase and the move to biennial delegate meetings. This enables the union’s leadership to stick to the budget agreed to get the union’s finances back on track, with the clear aim of ensuring we survive as an independent union.

The majority of decisions taken in Newcastle – where the host NUJ branches played a blinder in providing fellow members with a warm welcome to the city – are, of course, about the detail of the union’s work and priorities. As I write, we’re planning the campaigns and activities that will keep us more than busy between now and the next delegate meeting – that will be in London in April 2014, then every two years from then on.

Of course, our recent experience shows us that events sometimes derail even the best laid plans – who could have predicted events at News International and the setting up of the Leveson Inquiry at our previous delegate meeting in April 2011?

At the same time, we’ll be stepping up other campaigns – fighting to improve pay and conditions at a time when the industry is under attack, defending the very existence of our local and regional newspapers; ensuring our freelance members get the support they need; adding to the number of collective agreements we currently have and extending to many more journalists the protection and bargaining clout the NUJ brings.

What was particularly inspiring about the delegate meeting was the chance to reflect on all of the excellent work done over the last 18 months – the victories and results for journalists and journalism. It’s easy sometimes to focus on the challenges we face and the things that are wrong in the industry, but it’s absolutely right to sometimes sit back and let the difference the NUJ makes hit home.

At the heart of our work in the coming 18 months will be a renewed attention to recruitment and retention. Our new immediate past president, Donnacha Delong, will be heading up this work. So expect a tap on the shoulder any day now!

We can only make headway with growing and organising our membership if we all play our part in recruitment. If you can volunteer your time or if you’ve got any ideas – whether it’s about campaigns that will strike a chord, workplaces where the NUJ could be organising better, or recruitment messages that will hit home, please share – email recruit@nuj.org.uk and get involved.

For all the latest news from the NUJ go to www.nuj.org.uk

To take part in debates see The Platform on the website
in brief...

WE STAY NEUTRAL ON POLITICS
Conference rejected an attempt to ‘politicise’ the NUJ by tying it to parties promoting socialist policies. President Donnacha DeLong said that he - along with most other NUJ members - wanted the freedom to criticise any political movement.

The motion would have committed the union to backing the nationalisation of banks and utilities and opposing austerity measures introduced by the coalition government.

SOMALIA ‘DEADLIEST’ FOR NEWSGATHERING
Somalia is the deadliest country in the world for journalists with 15 killed this year, Omar Faruq Osman, leader of the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), told delegates.
Conference voted to launch a global petition supporting NUSOJ members denied basic union rights at Nairobi radio station RBK, UN-funded and managed by British PR company Albany Associates.

CALL FOR FRESH LAW ON TOP PAY
The Trinity Mirror group chapel was congratulated for its campaign over boardroom greed which culminated in the resignation of chief executive Sly Bailey who amassed £14m in pay and bonuses while cutting hundreds of journalists’ jobs. Conference called for a law stifling that each company remuneration committee should have at least one elected employee representative.

FIGHT-BACK IDEA REJECTED
Delegates rejected a call from South Yorkshire branch for a ‘fight-back’ conference to co-ordinate industrial action with other unions over cuts to jobs, pensions, pay and conditions in the private and public sectors.

ATTACK ON HEALTH COVERAGE DEFEATED
A motion attacking the BBC and the Today programme in particular for its ‘superficial, inadequate, partial and misleading’ coverage of NHS reforms was defeated.

Subs increase and fewer delegate meetings

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS
Following the decision by the Delegate Meeting in Newcastle new contribution rates are follows and will take effect from 1st November 2012

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Minimum Rate (Declared income below £10,790.00 per year) and temporary membership is now £53.96

The ½% rate remains the same based on declared income of £13,600.00

The Euro Sterling rate is now £155.72 per year, equivalent to £12.98 per month

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Minimum Rate (Declared income below €14,431.20 per year) and temporary membership is now €72.16

The ½% rate remains the same based on declared income of €17,904.00

Union subscriptions will be increased by 5 per cent (a weekly increase of

U

tion subscriptions are to be increased slightly and the NUJ will move to a two year cycle of policy-making conferences following detailed debate at this year’s delegate meeting in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The decisions represent endorsement of the NUJ recovery plan adopted by the union’s national executive council this summer. However, delegates decided to censure the leadership’s response to the financial crisis affecting the union in a resolution which said: “At a time when our members are being hit by wholesale job losses in the industry, it is crucial that this union is a competent viable force which is able to provide support to its members.”

Union subscriptions will be increased by 5 per cent (a weekly increase of

‘POWERFUL FORCE FOR GOOD’

he first woman leader of the TUC paid tribute to the NUJ as a ‘powerful force for good’ in the media industry and in wider society.

NUJ member and TUC general secretary-elect Frances O’Grady commended NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet for her testimony to the Leveson inquiry. Michelle was a ‘powerful, eloquent champion of both journalists and journalism’, said Frances. “The events at News International provide a hard lesson in what happens when corporate power is left unchecked by free and independent unions.”

Journalists were being asked to work on the cheap. You can’t have ‘top quality output with rock bottom employment standards,’ she said.

Photographers get their own council

elegates voted narrowly – by 58 to 51 – to create an NUJ Photographers’ Council.

The new national body will represent photographers, photojournalists and video journalists.

The national executive opposed the establishment of the new council, pointing out that it would cost £10,000 at a time when the union is attempting to cut costs.

However, Bristol branch argued successfully that despite the recent creation of a photographers’ seat on the NEC, they considered themselves to be an ‘under-represented minority’ in the NUJ who sometimes had to look to outside bodies for specialist representation.

MARK PINDER
Independence needs financial recovery – Stanistreet

Members must do everything in their power to ensure that the NUJ remains an independent trade union, general secretary Michelle Stanistreet told delegates to the union’s conference in Newcastle-upon-Tyne this month as she set the scene for vital debates and decisions on finances and the future of the NUJ.

“Some people have said that the current financial crisis affords us a golden opportunity for merger,” she said. “I believe I speak for the vast majority of members when I say that this would be catastrophic for our union.

“Our strength comes in our clear focus on journalists and journalism, which we are only able to provide as an independent, campaigning trade union. It’s not something we could achieve if we were a small secti.on rattling round in a large general union. Our independence is vital.

“That’s why the key element of the financial recovery plan and the budget for the next year is something we should all be proud of – the commitment to rebuilding our reserves with a target of £2.5 million over the next decade. That is the guarantor of our future political independence and stability.”

Emphasising a theme which underlined many of the debates at NUJ Delegate Meeting 2012, the general secretary said that recruiting more members was the best possible way out of the union’s financial crisis.

“Every single member of the NUJ can play a part in our recovery,” she said. “Think of a colleague you know who isn’t a member of the union and persuade them to join. There is huge scope for the union to grow in numbers – the best possible way for the NUJ to thrive and flourish.”

And she urged: “We need to make ourselves more relevant; we need to encourage greater participation. That’s the only way we’ll grow stronger and bigger, and ensure that we’re genuinely representative of the broader membership.”

Highfield’s platform-neutral rodents

Johnston Press chief executive Ashley Highfield’s vision of a ‘platform-neutral’ future contrasted with the rodent-infested reality in which some of his employees work.

Irish organiser Nicola Coleman told delegates about a woman journalist at the Roe Valley Sentinel routinely sharing her office with rats in Limavady, County Derry.

Colleagues at the Irish midlands Leinster Express reported a dead mouse was left in the training room for three weeks. Water dripped from a leaking roof on to electrical equipment so that computers had to be covered with bin-liners.

Delegates called for a ‘new deal’ with the company which recognised the workload and health risks for journalists which are inherent in Highfield’s new ‘platform neutral’ strategy.

You’ve just got to ask

You can’t beat personal contact when it comes to recruitment, NUJ president Donnacha DeLong told delegates. He pointed out that numerous studies had found that the main reason people don’t join unions is because nobody bothers to ask them. “I’ve recruited people on Facebook, on Twitter, on LinkedIn simply by telling them we exist and asking them to join.” He said every member should follow suit to keep the NUJ as an independent union.

Donnacha called for volunteers to help and urged members to ‘get out there and talking to people we want to recruit’. He said there were excellent examples of good practice such as the initiative at Westminster University’s freshers’ fair where the London Photographers’ Branch signed up more than 100 new student members.

In brief...

STV uses NUJ training unit

Delegates welcomed the decision by STV to employ 20 new journalists on their STV Local platform and the company’s commitment to train them through NUJ Training Scotland. A resolution from Glasgow branch passed by conference welcomed STV’s commitment to invest in journalism declaring that it was ‘the only major media organisation in the UK to do so’.

The BBC in Scotland was urged to emulate STV.

Still strict censorship

Burmesse journalists are still working under the strictest censorship rules in the world despite the recent election, campaigns officer at Burma Campaign UK Wei Hiin Pwint Thon told delegates. She is the daughter of Ko Mya Aye, who was released this January after five years in jail for his part in protests in 2007.

Press cards in Welsh

The union is to urge the UK Press Card Authority to allow NUJ press cards to be made bi-lingual in Wales. A conference motion pointed out that Welsh had been an official language in Wales since February 9, 2011 and that a substantial proportion of members in parts of Wales used it in their work and everyday life.

Performance pay resisted

The union is to organize a training seminar for chapel reps to equip them to resist an increasing trend towards performance-related pay which is ‘divisive and demotivating’ and does not deliver the positive results often claimed by employers, conference decided.

NEC must buy media shares

Conference urged the NEC to carry out the instruction of the 2010 delegate conference and buy small amounts of shares in major media companies to allow access to their annual meetings.
Red letter day for the NUJ as Murdoch is quizzed

FIGHT TO PROTECT BELFAST SOURCES

NUJ members Ed Moloney and Anthony McIntyre were given delegates’ full support for their fight against a US judicial decision attempting to force them to reveal the identities of confidential sources interviewed for the Belfast Project, an examination of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The interviews are part of an archive at Boston College to which the Police Service of Northern Ireland is demanding access.

VITAL STATISTICS FROM THE DM

At the NUJ Delegate Meeting 2012 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 176 delegates – 60 per cent of them men – discussed 93 motions and 93 amendments, along with 30 late notice motions (most of which were tabled at the conference rather than appearing in the final agenda). They adopted 63 reports.

Fourteen students attended the conference, 64 per cent of them women.

NEW INQUIRY INTO GENDER BALANCE

The NUJ’s equality council congratulated the union for increasing the proportion of women on the NEC from 13 per cent to 32 per cent but pointed out that female representation on some other bodies had declined. The NEC was instructed to report on gender balance generally on NUJ committees with a view to correcting any imbalance.

PROTEST SET FOR TURKISH EMBASSY

Delegates heard from Barry White, member of the European Federation of Journalists steering committee, who spoke of the plight of Turkish journalists, 76 of whom have been imprisoned. He said the NUJ would be organising a protest at the Turkish embassy in London.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST DEMOCRACY

The NEC is to examine the use of telephone conferencing and Skype to encourage more members to participate in NUJ democracy.

NO INQUIRY INTO JEREMY DEAR PAYMENT

Delegates rejected a call for an inquiry into the payment to former general secretary Jeremy Dear of more than £45,000 in respect of notice, holidays, untaken sabbatical leave, tax and national insurance when he resigned in 2011. An open letter Jeremy said: “I received no severance pay... no payments were made in secret”. Pete Murray, president at the time of Jeremy Dear’s departure, apologised that negotiations with Jeremy Dear in which he had taken part had not been reported adequately to the national executive. He said: “The money was not a gift, nor a bung or pay off, it was part of his contractual entitlement. Not to report it to the NEC was a mistake, an oversight. I messed up badly for not doing that and I apologise.”

Tim Dawson disagreed. He said collective bargaining was vital because it led to an increase in wages and the reduction of inequality. It gave workers a voice and it was a matter of justice.

Two union veterans are honoured

Former Morning Star industrial correspondent Roy Jones and BBC veteran John Barsby were made NUJ members of honour with warm standing ovations from delegates. Born in north Wales, Roy (pictured right with wife Cladys and John Barsby) worked in the oil industry and construction, before joining the NUJ in 1982. John left the Nottingham Evening Post in the 1970s, where he had been on strike for seven weeks, and joined the Sheffield Star where he then found himself out for 13 weeks. He then joined the BBC. A former NUJ president, he now takes over as NUJ honorary general treasurer from veteran Anita Halpin.

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Defying the cynical image of journalists, **David Gow** signed up as a volunteer for the Olympics

It was, male and many female colleagues drooled, the dream assignment: beach volleyball at the Olympics. Who could ask for anything more? A bevy of Brazilian beauties in micro-bikinis, long-legged California Girls to die for, and all up close and personal. Peak of my 40-year-plus career, I shouted.

Never mind the odd downside: having to “interview” (get quotes from) towering (2m-plus tall) German, Dutch and American men with, frankly, little of interest to say after playing beach volleyball well into their mid- or late-thirties. And being forced to bite one’s tongue at the odd arbitrary ruling from some officials at Locog (Seb Coe’s organising committee) who clearly couldn’t report their way out of a paper bag.

I was one of the 70,000 volunteers or Games Makers who, dressed in Stella Mac’s red and purple, “made the Games” in the words of Coe, Jacques Rogge, Boris Johnson, Dave Cameron and countless athletes giving spontaneous tributes. Those smiley, happy people who, it’s now said, deserve to be given a collective gong in the New Year’s Honours for looking after athletes and spectators alike with unfailing hospitality and humour.

We were the lucky ones among the 250,000 who applied.

I was especially lucky as a “flash quotes reporter” still blessed with a (slowed-down) shorthand note after my NCTJ course 44 years ago. We spent our time at Horse Guards Parade watching matches from the temporary tribunes housing 15,000 braying spectators stamping their feet to the Stones’ Start Me Up and swilling beer close to midnight, a stone’s throw from those Downing Street flats. (Many volunteers saw nothing of the Games as they had their backs to them.) Then, as the final result became obvious, we’d rush down to the Mixed Zone to take our – very hierarchically-allotted – place in the line for interviews and swap high fives with the girls from Nantong and Fuzhou. Finally, we’d rush through the crowds, back to the Olympic News Service office to file our quotes to the 15,000 journalists in the media centre in Stratford.

I was the only professional journalist acting as volunteer on our gregarious team which was headed by a wise and generous Australian, included a writer ghosting five (yes, five) books with Wayne Rooney. We included a banker, a former oil industry exec, a Stanford PhD student in aeronautical engineering as well as retired teachers and an Ofsted inspector. Individually, some took to the task like seasoned citizen journalists; a few fell prey to (unnecessary) anxiety. But we were united in our motivation to: a) take part in the only likely home-based Olympics in our lifetime and b) “give back to the community.”

That’s why I took part. I’m chairman of Volunteer Centre Hackney in one of the six host boroughs – and we are very mindful of the need to make “legacy” a meaningful value added to the cultural, social and economic life of one of Britain’s fastest-growing, most diverse and socially mobile communities. We want to help create a genuine Big Society there, not the spending cuts-driven version espoused by Dave. Post-Games, it is reported that 40 per cent of Games Makers, many of whom had never volunteered before, want to do so again.

To help them, the Coalition needs to ease the financial plight of the third sector. It will be a cynical betrayal of the great volunteering spirit, which won the heart of the world at London 2012, if it ruins that legacy through pernicious and pig-headed parsimony.

PS: I won’t cry if I never see another game of beach volleyball in my life…
Many of the best news stories start their lives not from a media release or telephone call, but on the back of a beermat or torn up cigarette packet.

Here’s a case in point. In summer my newsdesk at the Yorkshire Evening Post would despatch a reporter and photographer from our Leeds base to the east coast of Yorkshire to go story hunting. There was no particular agenda or briefing. We were expected to dig out stories wherever we went, in the fishing towns and villages of Yorkshire.

We’d done our three days and were driving back over the beautiful North York Moors, on the road between Whitby and Pickering. We’d picked up several tales, one from the docks in Whitby, one from the fishing community, another about a 400-year-old bridge in danger of collapse due to modern lorries, a tale about a Bridlington guesthouse keeper.

There’s a pub half way along the Whitby to Pickering moor road called the Saltersgate. I decided to pop in for a pint – the custom was that the snapper always drove and got the mileage, the reporter got to enjoy a beer or two.

The pub had a dining room. Although it was a blazing summer’s day, there was a fire burning in the huge inglenook fireplace. I asked the licensee, why the fire? He told me.

Over 300 years ago the pub was used as a stopping off point for ox or horse drawn carts taking fish from Whitby to Pickering, and then to York. The carts stopped at the pub and in its cellars were stocks of salt for salting the fish to preserve them – no refrigeration in those days – hence the pub’s name.

At that time smuggling was rife on the east coast, and the pub was also the meeting place for smugglers passing on their contraband for sale inland. One night half a dozen smugglers were in the pub doing business when two excise men walked in. There was a fight with cutlasses and pistols and the excise men ended up dead. Knowing that the excise men’s failure to return to base would bring more, the landlord thought hard what to do with the bodies. He got no further. The girl’s father, an army sergeant, took the Registrar by the lapels and shook him. The marriage went ahead with no further racist interruptions from the still shaking Registrar.

Rahman became a British citizen – his fourth nationality. He took me to his home and introduced me to his family and to the Leeds Bangladeshi community, whose members were the poorest of all the South East Asian communities of Leeds.

I attended, and wrote about, the opening of their first mosque, down in part to Rahman’s hard work, in a converted terrace house in Chapeltown, a multicultural community of Leeds.

I attended his funeral some years ago at a grander mosque created by the community as its members work lifted them out of poverty.

Now a freelance, Pete Lazenby has a lot to remember after forty years as a staff reporter with the same paper, and some tips to pass on.

**Been down the pub?**

A legend grew up that if the pub fire went out ill-luck would befall the building, so it was kept constantly lit, burning peat from the neighbouring moors. In the 1960s a new landlord, scoffing at the legend, let the fire go out. Within days cracks started appearing in the walls around the fire, eventually threatening the roof. The landlord called in builders, had repairs done, and re-lit the fire.

The explanation for the cracks was almost certainly logical, that with the fire out the stone began to cool and shrink. Logic or not, the landlord resumed the custom.

Now, what a great tale. It made me a feature, but it was also picked up by media serving ex-pats in countries like Canada.
who sent a TV crew, and Australia, serving audiences who love ancient tales of the “old country.” And how did it come about? From going to a pub.

Nowadays the low levels of staffing, and pressure of work, on regional newspapers and radio stations make such forays rare, if they ever happen at all. But there’s nothing to stop the enthusiastic young reporter getting to know local licensees and cultivating them as contacts. They are a constant source of information and stories. I found one who kept a tarantula in an aquarium behind the bar, releasing it onto the counter at closing time if any customers were lingering too long.

I met one of Yorkshire’s last professional mole catchers in a pub. Moles are a curse for farmers. The earth they push up into hay which is to feed the animals over winter can kill a cow. So he’d shot, drowned, trapped, gassed and even blown up moles in their holes. Another nice tale.

I used to make a point of visiting Leeds’ wonderful Kirkgate market. As it became known I was a reporter always on the lookout for stories, stallholders would collar me, invite me into the dens at the back of their stalls for a cup of tea or something stronger, and regale me with tales about the doings of other stallholders, customers, market management, or arrival of rare imports. It reached a point where it took me two hours to walk through the market even if I’d only called in for a pound of sausages. So my advice to any young and enthusiastic reporter is: put yourself about a bit. Go for a pint in the pubs in the communities you serve.

Of course, this means initially doing it in your own time. But one of the rewards it reaped for me was that my newsdesk, knowing I was going to come up with the goods if they let me loose, would leave me to it. They knew if I was touring the hostleries of Leeds city centre there’d be a couple of decent page leads the next morning, and sometimes more. They’d let me wander to surrounding towns, such as the market town of Otley, a wonderful and newy community. That’s where I met the landlord with the tarantula, and the mole-catcher. So enjoy a pint, and good hunting.
Daniel Bennett, from the War Studies Department at Kings College, London, is taking part in a workshop organised by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism into the use of drones for newsgathering. He said: “You could see them being used for traffic surveillance or covering demonstrations. I think we are going to see this happening fairly soon; certainly within the next 12 months.”

“If you want to get really scary then the US military is developing insect-type models. Imagine trying to get stories by flying one of those through a window.”

The economic case for a drone is obvious when you weigh the cost of hiring a helicopter against £500 for a basic flying camera.

Legally you just need a permit from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and insurance if you are flying anything weighing less than 20kg near buildings or people for the purpose of data acquisition. The corridor between 200 feet and 1,000 feet where they operate is essentially a public path by any property.

However as John Moreland, spokesman for the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) industry body, points out: “The real question mark is not over the people who comply with the rules but those who don’t. How can you identify them? What kind of data is being collected and what is it being used for?”

According to Moreland, current codes of conduct require enforcement but it isn’t a task the CAA, or anyone else, shows

Phil Chamberlain reports on how journalism is taking to the air as newsgathering drones offer the prospect of ‘collateral intrusion’
signs of taking on. Each day the technology improves, the codes become more out of date.

“ar the privacy issues are serious and need to be thought about,” said Bennett. “At a demonstration you might not have much expectation of privacy, but if you are filming and happen to go past an office window and you are broadcasting live and you film people in the office, what then?

“It has been called ‘collateral intrusion’. If the drones are too small to see then you don’t even know it is happening.”

The biggest problems holding back their wider use are technical. They are operated by line of sight and tend to have a short flying time. Being lightweight makes them vulnerable in poor weather. They are quite noisy which restricts their usefulness for recording sound.

Nonetheless, their potential is clear. Last year Australia’s Channel Nine was barred from visiting a remote immigration detention centre – so flew a drone over the site to get footage.

It’s not just news outlets. Increasingly NGOs are using the technology to monitor their state or corporate opponents. A UAV was used to buzz a police line in Poland giving activists on the ground useful intelligence.

The BBC is certainly taking this very seriously. World affairs producer Stuart Hughes said: “It is something that is moving very fast and a lot of people have had the same idea at the same time.

“It feels like the early days of digital technology but nobody has quite jumped in.”

In fact the BBC’s research and development department has worked with the University of Southampton to develop a petrol-powered drone capable of staying aloft for two hours. The BBC sees the potential extending to providing a cheaper film option for its drama.

A number of independent television companies are also looking at using drones and indeed Nottingham-based Upper Cut Productions, specialises in it.

Press Association photographer Lewis Whyld has developed his own UAV which he used this year to take pictures of flooding in the UK.

“My UAVs are primarily designed for use in other countries,” said Whyld. “I plan on invading the privacy of dictators, despot and human rights abusers who massacre civilians with impunity.

“Every generation of journalists has a responsibility to use the tools available to them in order to discover and report the truth. My UAVs are for use in places where people are being shot in their back-gardens rather than sunbathing. It’s as simple as that.”

Over at the University of Nebraska Prof Matt Waite is in charge of a drone lab funded with $50,000 from the Knight Foundation. In a decade he thinks they’ll be as common as smart phones.

“Using UAVs for data journalism is what interests me the most,” said Prof Waite. “Being able to get imagery of a wide area using multi-spectral cameras would allow you to do things like analyze vegetation patterns or water stress. True colour imagery could be used in ground truthing government data.

“Using UAVs for data journalism is a lot harder to think of because the applications are vastly more complicated, but they’re there and they could be very compelling.

“They’ll be a very useful tool, but I think they’re just another tool. Drones will not be writing stories. Drones will not find the humanity in a story. Drones will be a tool for journalists to do what they do best: journalism. And that’s all that they are.

“In 10 years we’ll look back at all this fuss about drones and wonder why we were so worked up.”
James Rodgers reflects on what reporting from a modern war zone is all about

As the train slowed on its way to its final stop, I listened hard for gunfire above the rattle and clunk of wheel on aged rail. It was January 1992, and I was arriving in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. The country was newly independent following the fall of the Soviet Union, and had itself now descended into war.

It was my first assignment to a war zone. In the twenty years since, a lot has changed in the way that journalists work when covering conflict. The technology has been transformed, the ‘platforms’ (in Tbilisi then we would only have used that word about the railway station) have changed and multiplied.

Yet much has stayed the same too. Then, as now, there is the great challenge of working out who is giving reliable information. There is the mixture of honesty and caution you should use when meeting people as you go about gathering news: honesty about who you are and what you are doing (lies or half-lies told for convenience can become extremely inconvenient later), caution about disclosing too much about your plans. You might, after all, be talking to a would-be kidnapper. From that first assignment to Georgia, I will never forget a correspondent from the United States surrounded by edgy demonstrators who were angrily ordering him to ‘tell the truth’: that is, give their version of events. They were aggressive, perhaps as a result of nerves and fear. The day before, there had been a similar demonstration in the same place, demanding the return to power of the government which had been overthrown. Some of the successful insurgents had turned up and opened fire on the protesters. Some were killed. The rest fled.

Now, as then, safety was a concern. In that war, few people were in uniform. If they were, it was old battledress from days of national service in the Soviet Army. It was hard to know who was who, or where the danger might come from. This is the nature of many of the conflicts of the last twenty years. If the troops invading Afghanistan or Iraq, or the Israeli Army in Gaza or on the West Bank, or the Russian forces in the North Caucasus, were all clearly identifiable, their enemies were not. That uncertainty – combined with the fact that combatants seem to worry less and less about killing journalists – makes difficult and dangerous work more difficult and more dangerous. The statistics for journalist deaths covering conflict seem to get worse every year. Thankfully, training about hostile environment and first aid are much more widespread than once they were – the threats, though, have multiplied at an even greater rate.

As the train slowed on its way to its final stop, I listened hard for gunfire above the rattle and clunk of wheel on aged rail. It was January 1992, and I was arriving in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. The country was newly independent following the fall of the Soviet Union, and had itself now descended into war. It was my first assignment to a war zone. In the twenty years since, a lot has changed in the way that journalists work when covering conflict. The technology has been transformed, the ‘platforms’ (in Tbilisi then we would only have used that word about the railway station) have changed and multiplied.

Yet much has stayed the same too. Then, as now, there is the great challenge of working out who is giving reliable information. There is the mixture of honesty and caution you should use when meeting people as you go about gathering news: honesty about who you are and what you are doing (lies or half-lies told for convenience can become extremely inconvenient later), caution about disclosing too much about your plans. You might, after all, be talking to a would-be kidnapper. From that first assignment to Georgia, I will never forget a correspondent from the United States surrounded by edgy demonstrators who were angrily ordering him to ‘tell the truth’: that is, give their version of events. They were aggressive, perhaps as a result of nerves and fear. The day before, there had been a similar demonstration in the same place, demanding the return to power of the government which had been overthrown. Some of the successful insurgents had turned up and opened fire on the protesters. Some were killed. The rest fled.

Now, as then, safety was a concern. In that war, few people were in uniform. If they were, it was old battledress from days of national service in the Soviet Army. It was hard to know who was who, or where the danger might come from. This is the nature of many of the conflicts of the last twenty years. If the troops invading Afghanistan or Iraq, or the Israeli Army in Gaza or on the West Bank, or the Russian forces in the North Caucasus, were all clearly identifiable, their enemies were not. That uncertainty – combined with the fact that combatants seem to worry less and less about killing journalists – makes difficult and dangerous work more difficult and more dangerous. The statistics for journalist deaths covering conflict seem to get worse every year. Thankfully, training about hostile environment and first aid are much more widespread than once they were – the threats, though, have multiplied at an even greater rate. Journalist deaths in Syria this year, and Libya last
– to say nothing of those courageous colleagues murdered for covering drug wars in Mexico – demonstrate the danger.

After that first experience of covering armed conflict, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to report from Chechnya, Gaza, the West Bank, Iraq, and then, in 2008 return to Georgia the year that country went to war with its northern neighbour, Russia, over the status of the separatist territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I say ‘fortunate’ because experiences such as those – and, unlike many people caught up in conflict, I had gone there entirely of my own accord – give you a perspective on international affairs which is shown to few, including policy makers. I have a pair of boots which I bought in Manhattan on September 15th, 2001 during a brief break from reporting. On December 15th 2003, I was wearing them in the underground hideout where Saddam Hussein had been caught some 36 hours earlier. Covering that latter event was exciting, hazardous, and exhausting. It was also an exercise in another of the conflict reporter’s contemporary challenges: dealing with government spin.

In a world where the certainties which came with the Cold War have vanished and the insecurities which have followed September 11 and the financial crisis are the reality, we need good coverage of conflict more than ever. We need to understand the world around us to know what our may lie ahead, and what our options are.

Despite the great assistance which lighter, more mobile, technology has offered to journalists in war zones, and the possibilities of social media, nothing has yet emerged to replace the eyewitness report: the journalist who is prepared to go and get his or her boots dirty, to take risks, to tell us what is going on.

That is what our audiences – on air, in print, or online – need more than ever to make sense of a changing world. The environment of uncertainty in which we live now is set to continue – and that is likely to mean more armed conflict, whether over politics, religion, or resources. We may one day add 2011, and the Arab uprisings, to 1991 and 2001 as years which changed the world.

The journalist covering the conflicts of this century needs to combine the best of the old, and the best of the new. The best of the old means good storytelling, and thorough fact-checking. The best of the new means making the most of what technology can now offer for sources, and sending material, without forgetting that you need to have a story to tell.

Above all, a reporter in a war zone should be at the heart of that story, without trying to be the story. Allan Little, accepting the Charles Wheeler award for broadcast journalism earlier this year, put it well: ‘it was never about him.’ As journalists covering conflict, we should always remember that, valuable though our role is as storytellers, the people in the story are more important.

James Rodgers is Lecturer in Journalism at City University, London. He was formerly a BBC correspondent in Moscow, Brussels, and Gaza. His book, Reporting Conflict, has just been published by Palgrave MacMillan.
R

remember when bloggers were portrayed as the enemy of professional journalists. They were lumped in with “citizen journalists” and denounced as opinionated amateurs who couldn’t do anything useful like report a mags court or cover a council meeting.

Andrew Marr derided bloggers as “socially inadequate, pimpled, single, slightly seedy, bald, cauliflower-nosed young men sitting in their mother’s basements and ranting.”

While Rod Liddle in the Sunday Times described “blogsville” as: “That vast network of talentless and embittered individuals tapping away at their keyboards in the intellectual vacuum of cyberspace.”

Now there are millions of bloggers, including many journalists, and the dismissive view of them as “ranters in their dressing gowns” has been transformed.

There are now the blogs to riches stories. Like Pete Cashmore who created the Mashable technology news site by blogging from his bedroom in Aberdeenshire when he was 19. Seven years later it’s been valued at $200 million and Cashmore is lauded in the Daily Mail as the “planet’s sexiest geek”.

Guido Fawkes, aka Paul Staines, the right wing blogger could boast at a conference organised by the NUJ London Freelance Branch: “I have achieved the Marxist ideal. I own the means of production and distribution. I have job security, I can’t be fired and do much better than many journalists.”

Some journalists have shown you can make a living through blogging.

Freelance journalist Chris Wheal, a stalwart of the NUJ’s Professional Training Committee, helped launch a finance channel for AOL, using freelance bloggers and had the job title “lead blogger”. He also help set-up AOL Money.

Wheal says: “I think blogs can lead to people getting work. I know some bloggers get bought in-house by various media organisations. I am sure there are some who generate enough traffic to earn advertising income. Blogs have broken many of the big stories of the past decade – ahead of traditional media. Blogs can make a name for you, help build contacts and so on.”

He adds that successful bloggers have to market themselves. “You do it in different way: commenting on other people’s blogs, linking to yours, using Twitter and Facebook and email groups.”

There are bloggers who have been spotted and offered jobs. Josh Halliday blogged about journalism and education, started a hyper-local site and had a high Twitter profile when he was a journalism student at the University of Sunderland. He was noticed by the Guardian before he graduated and is now a media and technology reporter for the paper.

Nowadays, most journalism lecturers are urging their students to blog as a way of showing potential employers what they are capable of.

Patrick Smith, a blogger and editor of TheMediaBriefing site, says: “There are countless examples of writers finding fame and fortune from their blogs. The amateur writer has never been more powerful. 50 Shades of Grey was a self-published book in the sub-genre of Twilight fan fiction that’s now one of the western world’s best-selling books.

The idea that authors or journalists need to have their words printed on a physical medium to be successful has been exploded. Not least, blogs can have the positive effect of raising someone’s profile enough for them to translate expertise and knowledge into paid work.

“I wouldn’t put much hope in the idea of making a living from advertising or direct payments from a blog site, but if I was starting out as a journalist now I’d look at the ebook market and look at how I could be a part of it and a blog is a good place to start.”

For many journalists blogging isn’t a living but a way of...
promoting themselves and their work. But it’s important to remember that blogging is publishing, and the same defamation and other laws apply. Also, other people’s blogs are covered by copyright, just like yours.

“Don’t expect to get rich blogging,” advises journalist and author Martin Cloake. “For most bloggers it’s not going to happen. When I decided I wanted to leave my staff job and go freelance, I took the plunge. I needed to find out how online media worked, and the best way is by using it. So I set up a website and a blog to see how they worked and how best to use them. I also did it to raise my profile and showcase my work.”

Getting started is easy using free blogging software, like WordPress or Blogger, but you’ve still got to have something to write about. Cloake says: “The first thing you need when establishing a blog is something to say. Having a purpose helps you decide what it is you want to say. My purpose was to raise my profile, to show people how I could write and what I could write. I have had offers of paid work and commissions because people have read my blog.”

He is now back working full time with a staff job but says: “For a media worker, not using a blog is a bit like refusing to use electricity.”

Colin Randall, the Daily Telegraph’s former Paris bureau chief, runs the Salut! site which is a successful continuation of the blog about France he started while on the Telegraph. He also blogs about Sunderland FC at Salut! Sunderland and about folk music at Salut! Live.

“Unless you hit upon an extremely good idea blogging won’t resolve lost income from a staff job,” he says. “Get as much pleasure from it as you can and see what flows from it. As a still active freelance I can use my blog as an archive and library. I get immense pleasure and pride from running blogs.”

There’s another reason for blogging in these precarious times for journalists. Ruthless managements can close your newspaper or magazine but they can’t shut your blog.

Jon Slattery is a freelance media journalist who blogs about journalism at jonslattery.blogspot.com.
Playing Journalists

These are tough times for Austerity Britain – so tough that now there are video games enabling you to work at a pretend job rather than being a superhero fighting crime and righting wrongs, or single-handedly battling an alien invasion.

These games are aimed at young girls and the jobs in question are splendidly politically incorrect: there are titles like Imagine Fashion Designer, Imagine Movie Star, Imagine Teacher – and Imagine Reporter.

A popular choice for a dream job for ‘tween girls who have managed to resist the lures of stardom, fluffy animals and living off child benefit is, apparently, to be a journalist.

Lots of video game characters are journalists – for instance, Frank West in Dead Rising, Elena Fisher from Uncharted, Madison Paige in Heavy Rain and Nico Collard in Broken Sword. But a game where the actual aim is simply to be a journalist is surely something new.

In Imagine: Reporter, we play a journalism graduate called Madison. Being a character in a game, Madison doesn’t have to spend 18 months unemployed and living off mouldy bread in an overpriced bedsit. So, no yearly unpaid internships for her without any promise of a job at the end of it. No pitching endless ideas to editors who then ignore her, steal the ideas and write them up themselves, obviously.

Asked why she wants to be a journalist, Madison explains, very accommodatingly, that she’s ‘ready to travel all over the world’. "One day, I’d like to have my own TV show," she says, somewhat predictably.

In its first real nod towards reality, Imagine Reporter makes Madison start at the bottom – that is, pursuing the kind of dull local news stories that bulk up every local paper across the country. These include stories about big-hearted firefighters rescuing cats stuck in trees (although – newsflash – fire departments don’t actually do this), school basketball games and shopping centre openings. To win a ‘gold medal’ on an article, the player has to play a series of mini games successfully. These include cycling round town and grabbing all the scoops that magically appear on the roads, taking photos of people at the right time when they pose and clicking on word bubbles that pop up as you interview people.

There’s another game, Let’s Play: Journalists, which has a bigger budget and is a little better – we play as Venus, who has just landed herself her first job on the City News. She starts her first day by giving her editor ‘attitude’ and complaining about the mundane tasks he makes her do before he’ll ‘give her a story’.

Once Venus has finished sassing her boss, he sets her the task of investigating a spate of stolen pets from a local park. She gets the scoop by wearing various disguises and socially engineering information out of people, hacking passwords and sneaking into places to pilfer information. Careful, dear, Lord Leveson might want words with you about that but at least she gets out and about and uses her gumption to follow the story.

There isn’t a great end to her first task, however, as the paper is sued for libel, since she forgot to find any evidence to back up her accusations. Her response? ‘Well, if you thought it was libellous, then you shouldn’t have published it.’ Not a good first day at the office.

Neither game features any of that dull nonsense like fact checking, grammar exercises, determining if sources are reliable – the game avoids those unpleasant things in the way many people who call themselves journalists these days seem to.

Both are both laughably poorly written – the writers of Let’s Play, for example, can’t tell the difference between ‘can’t’ and ‘can’t’.

It’s a depressing sign of the times when there are video games that are about having a job. Is that what young people dream of these days, not boldly going into space and discovering fascinating alien civilisations or being the hero of the hour and saving the world?

Emma Boyes finds that glamorous virtual journalists don’t have to survive on mouldy bread

Emma Boyes
WHAT NEXT FOR WINDOWS?

Has Microsoft reinvented itself for a new era of post-PC computing? Or has the company behind Windows defenestrated itself? Its new operating system launched on October 25th and is literally Windows, without Windows.

Baffled? You’re not alone. Which? Magazine’s Deputy Technology Editor, Andy Vandervell, anticipates much consumer confusion. He describes getting hands on with a new Windows tablet thus: “There are so many problems here that I don’t know where to start.”

The defining image of Windows 8 is the new Start screen. This is the first thing you see after booting up and replaces the Start menu for launching programs. It features large icons that are finger friendly for touch sensitive displays, and you find system controls not by tapping icons, but by swiping a gesture from the edge of the panel.

The Start screen launches new, full screen ‘apps’ which look like tablet ones. Either your email takes over the whole monitor, or it’s hidden where you can’t see it.

The traditional desktop with its multitaskable panes is still available in some versions of Windows 8 and existing applications will continue to work, but developers are encouraged away from making programs for it and customers are steered away from using it. Its day is done. It is, like hot metal and linotype, a legacy technology.

And this is important, because as much as journalists tend to love shiny Apple gear the vast majority are – like our readers – stuck with Windows for reasons of cost or corporate policy or both. There’s nothing forcing you to upgrade to Windows 8 yet – and the advice from Gartner is that businesses should skip it and go straight to Windows 9 – but the new look is the future. So if you’re thinking of buying a new laptop you might want to do it while Windows 7 is still available.

I think journalists will hold out against Windows 8 longer than most. Despite being early adopters of gadgets like smartphones and tablets, I think most of us are absolutely reliant on the old desktop workflow and too resilient to change to dump it.

Because we’d need someone to write a full screen Windows 8 app which can keep multiple browser tabs open for research and fact checking, and simultaneously display several live streams of Twitter and wire content for keeping an eye on breaking stories. Except they already did. It’s called Windows 7.

So if you’re thinking of buying a new laptop you might want to do it while Windows 7 is still available.

The success of Windows 8 will largely be down to the laptops which support it. The ability to combine tablet-style touch controls with a full fat operating system is encouraging manufacturers like ASUS and Lenovo to come up with designs that either fold back on themselves to hide the keyboard when you don’t need it, or detach the screen from the keyboard altogether for slate-like convenience.

However, the defining consideration now for most of us remains price. The 15.6inch Sleekbook is a ‘thin and light’ machine which is within 2mm height and 100g weight of the d new 15inch MacBook Pro. At just under £500, however, it costs less than a quarter the price of Apple’s notebook – and build quality is way above any other laptop I’ve seen at this price.

With its brushed aluminium lid and tough, rubberised base it’ll take a few knocks in your work bag too. Comparing the MacBook Pro and the Sleekbook is, of course, more than slightly misleading. With the expensive Apple machine you get a quad core processor and a incredible 2880x1800 resolution screen. HP have kept the price down by using a cut price CPU from AMD and an optically challenged 1366x768 display.

The former is absolutely a compromise you can live with, and means you get a full power laptop for almost netbook money. The screen, however, has nowhere near enough pixels for the size of the panel: colours are OK, but much of the time text appears overly large and blocky rather than crisp and clear.

Screen aside, in my testing the HP notebook proved itself comfortable to type on, fast enough to work on and light enough to carry around without risking a hernia. If you’re happy to accept the display’s failings, it’s an excellent budget workhorse.

Adam Oxford on the latest trends and kit
lobbing and Leveson – two L’s currently casting a shadow over journalism and politics. The NUJ is ensuring our voice is heard about both issues because our day-to-day work will be changed for better or worse by the outcomes.

In the same way questionable journalistic practices led to Leveson, the actions of a minority of lobbyists means there is significant pressure on government to regulate and control lobbyists.

The NUJ has played a notable role representing journalists’ interests in the Leveson enquiry. The lobbying debate looks to be at least as complex and needs our input too.

How do we define lobbying? The government’s own website suggests: “Lobbying is the practice of individuals and organisations trying to influence the opinions of MPs and Lords. Methods of lobbying vary and can range from sending letters, making presentations, providing briefing material to Members and organised rallies.”

This centres on Westminster. Others get lobbied too - MEPs, devolved assembly members, councillors, and officials to name just a few.

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (www.lobbyingtransparency.org/) wants a robust statutory register, stating: “whether companies or trade unions, lobbying agencies or law firms, and larger charities (above a minimum financial threshold) – to regularly declare on a public register:

• Names of individual lobbyists;
• The special interest lobbying (either the employer or agency clients);
• Public body being lobbied;
• Information on any public office held by lobbyists within 5 years (to reveal the ‘revolving door’) • Area of policy they seek to influence, whether legislation, regulation or public contract;
• Amount of money spent on lobbying (good faith estimate). This will reveal scale, disparities and trends in lobbying.”

At the heart of the lobbying debate is a recognition that people need to know how influence is used to do deals over public policy and spending public money. Making the links between professional lobbyists and those they lobby transparent is vital if the political system is to earn public trust.

The devil will almost certainly be in the detail and how definitions are made. The NUJ has worked with ALT and we also need to reflect on concerns raised elsewhere, from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations to charities and not-for-profit organisations.

We also know NUJ activists and officials are potentially lobbyists too. For the NUJ members working in PR it will be important to balance registration obligations with practicality.

With many sole-traders and small PR companies spending a limited amount of their time involved in lobbying, registration needs to be simple, cheap and realistic.

The alternative will be to drive those who can’t meet stringent rules out of the business, leaving the field clear for bigger organisations who can afford the time and money to deal with administration and bureaucracy.

The NUJ could also play a useful role in policing the system, making sure it is implemented fairly and proportionately.

We are not alone as a representative organisation looking at lobbying. The NUJ being by far the biggest trade union in the industry and the CIPR’s role as the PR industry’s professional body provides an excellent opportunity to work in tandem.

Working together, we can make that our voices heard more effectively.

The importance of professionalism and integrity, along with a commitment to making sure solutions are workable and recognise the complexity and diversity of lobbying will underpin how successful any legislation is.

For more information on lobbying transparency: www.lobbyingtransparency.org
**The NUJ and Me**

**What made you become a journalist?**
I was desperate to switch over from charity PR to journalism as journalists seemed to have far more interesting lives. Curiosity and thirst for knowledge played a big part. A craving for the ego-feeding byline bore no influence whatsoever.

**What other job might you have done?**
I’ve been a semi pro jazz singer for seven years, and maybe if I’d started younger it could have been my actual profession instead of a sideline. I was very musical as a child and played four instruments.

**When did you join the NUJ and why?**
In 1988 when I started in charity PR, for networking reasons initially, but I realised the true value of membership early on when I had reason to call on the legal services of the union who gave me endless support.

**Are many of your friends in the union?**
Yes, almost all journalist friends.

**What’s been your best moment in your career?**
I interviewed three self confessed ‘rough diamonds’ who had rescued 38 of Marchioness survivors from a nearby cruiser. Their contribution went unrecognised, and whilst they weren’t seeking glory, the total lack of acknowledgement for their considerable part in the rescue was affecting them badly. I got a cover in the Sunday Express magazine telling their story and it was life changing for them as it led to acknowledgement and a proper ‘thank you’.

**And in the union?**
Discovering there was going to be a new branch setting up in my area, Lewisham – I hadn’t realised I was surrounded by so many other journalists. The pleasure was enhanced when I got a gig at the pub our inaugural meeting was held in.

**And the worst ones?**
Whenever I hear of falling membership figures.

**What is the worst place you’ve ever worked in?**
Saatchi & Saatchi in the 1980s, where I met some of the most unpleasant people I’ve ever encountered in my life.

**And the best?**
Freelancing in the 1990s when there were decent budgets to support foreign and research-heavy stories.

**What advice would you give someone starting in journalism?**
Think seriously if you want to be a generalist or a specialist.

**What advice would you give a new freelance?**
Never, ever write for less than NUJ rates, or on spec.

**Who is your biggest hero?**
Emmeline Pankhurst.

**And villain?**
Cameron.

**Which six people (alive or dead) would you invite to a dinner party?**
Tony Benn, my late dad, Jeremy Hardy, Sarah Vaughan, Oscar Wilde, Germaine Greer.

**What was your earliest political thought?**
At grammar school aged about 14, I’d started going to parties at the houses of the ‘posh girls’. They had much more comfortable lives than me and my family which didn’t seem fair as both of my parents worked really hard.

**What are your hopes for journalism over the next five years?**
Call me old fashioned, but it is that British people will realise there is no comparison between reading news online and sitting in a comfy armchair, head back, licking a finger and thumb and turning real paper pages at leisure.

**And fears?**
That they won’t.

**What one thing would you most want to change in the next 12 months?**
I’d like to see an industry campaign mounted to get the public back to reading paid for newspapers.

**Who would you most like to see in the NUJ?**
Every single young person entering journalism, including bloggers.

**How would you like to be remembered?**
As someone with verve, passion, irreverence, and a commitment to fairness and social justice who could see humour in classically unfunny situations. And who had quite a good voice.
Old and new they’re here for you. Theatre, film, exhibitions, music and books

Theatre
This House
National Theatre, Cottesloe, South, London, SE1 9PX.
Until December 1.
Already sold out run with 37,000 tickets grabbed by the NT’s subscribers, this is the only original play in the theatre’s autumn season from up-and-coming author James Graham. A political drama starring Philip Glenister of TVs Life on Mars and Ashes to Ashes fame and Phil Daniels – Quadrophenia and Eastenders. Set behind closed doors of Westminster in 1974, following the gruelling practical realities of government whips’ attempt to coerce a stubbornly hung parliament. As the UK faces economic crises, the play takes a glimpse at a period when votes were won or lost by one, there were fist fights in the bar and sick MPs carried through the lobby to register their vote. Extra tickets may become available as well as returns. To sign up for an email alert: www.nationaltheatre.org.uk or telephone the box office on 020 7452 3000.

The President and the Pakistani
Waterloo East Theatre, London, SE1
Until November 4. £15 or £12 concessions
A story of a young man and the friend he has to leave behind to achieve his dreams. Based on an incredible chapter in the life of Barack Obama, when he lived in a crime-ridden and violent neighbourhood with an illegal Pakistani immigrant, a gripping play about a night when a hunt for the truth exposes the lies we want to believe in. Written by Evening Standard reporter Roshid Razaq. www.waterlooeast.co.uk or www.president-pakistani.com

Film
The Campaign
Warner Bros. In cinemas now
Starring and produced by comedians Will Ferrell and Zach Galifianakis.
Directed by Jay Roach. A comedy of two rival North Carolina politicians

That ‘comedy is the new rock ‘n’ roll’ is a cliche now but the number of performers on the road and filling giant venues, theatres and clubs (sometimes touring throughout the year), on TV and radio or selling millions of DVDs, is proof the British public’s appetite for comedy is insatiable. Political, rude, obnoxious or just plain funny, a whole plethora of comedy giants and up and coming mirth makers are treading the boards of Britain.

Alexei Sayle, comedian, author, actor, script-writer, columnist, presenter and first ever MC of the Comedy Store in the early 80s, starred in the seminal Young Ones and wrote Stalin Ate My Homework, his entertaining memoir about growing up with parents who were staunch communists. His father, Joe, was a union leader and a member of both the Labour and Communist Parties. Alexei is now 60 years old and is appearing in small venues around the country, partly to see if he can still do it onstage, finishing at Cardiff’s Glee Club on November 22. He plans to follow this up in January 2013 with 10 days at the Soho Theatre, London. “The point of this little tour is partly just to do it but also to try and see whether I can put together a 50 minute plus show for that venue,” says Alexei. “Over the years I’ve written regularly for the Sunday Mirror, Observer, Independent, Car magazine and Time Out. At a distance I love the newspaper business though I doubt I would want to see it much closer up.” Alexei currently writes a motoring column for the Telegraph.

Jimmy Carr, who has sold over a million DVDs and hosted and appeared on countless TV shows, does what he does best, live comedy. His Gagging Order tour is a brand new show, brand new jokes, some old Jimmy. The show promises to be packed with one-liners, stories and jokes. Some clever, some rude and a few totally unacceptable but just leave your conscience, sense of common decency and moral compass at home and go for a laugh. He’s on tour now and goes right through to December 2013.

Jeremy Hardy, Jo Brand, Dara O’Brian, Frankie Boyle, Marcus Brigstocke all appear regularly on television and radio but also tour constantly.

New and up and coming acts are also filling venues. To catch a comedy night in aid of the World Development Movement’s campaigning work to tackle the root causes of poverty, featuring a host of performers, Joking For Justice at the Bloomsbury Theatre, London on November 1, features cult writer and performer, Richard Herring of comedy duo Lee and Herring and a cast of numerous others including laid back comedienne Ava Vidal plus clued-up political comedian Andy Zaltzman.

INDEPTH

CONTAGIOUS COMEDY

Details of comedians’ performances are available on: www.jimmycarr.com; www.alexesisayle.me; www.jeremyhardy.co.uk; www.offthekerb.co.uk/jo-brand; www.daraobriain.com; www.frankieboyle.com; www.offthekeb.co.uk/jo-brand; www.axlexisayle.me; www.jeremyhardy.co.uk; www.marcusbrigstocke.com. Joking For Justice is at www.thebloombury.com

Some of the best things to see and do with a bit of political bite

For listings email: journalist@nuj.org.uk
Exhibitions
Each For All and All for Each
People’s History Museum, Manchester
Until November 5. Free
To coincide with the International Year of Co-operatives, this display is a journey from the Co-op’s origins to the political power of its parliamentary members and the 1927 agreement with the Labour Party and beyond.
www.phm.org.uk

Everything Was Moving: Photography from the 60s and the 70s
Barbican Art Gallery, London EC2
Until January 13. £10 online. £12 on the door
This brings together over 400 photographs, some rarely seen, others just discovered and many shown for the first time in the UK.
www.barbican.org.uk

Music
Idiot Bastard Band
November 1 – December 9
On tour and featuring Ade Edmondson on guitar, banjo, trumpet, mandolin, fiddle, coconuts; Neil Innes on keyboards, guitar, ukulele; Phill Jupitas on guitar, bass, kazoo, triangle; Rowland Rivron on drums, congas, bongos. It sounds mad and bad with a heady mixture of excitement and catastrophe but it’s bound to be hilarious.
www.idiotbastardband.co.uk

A Future That Works
October 20. Entry £7. Concessions £5
This should be Britain’s biggest march and rally to London’s Hyde Park against austerity and continues with the first after-party event with the politically charged ska band Captain Ska, Grace Petrie, Soothsayers and DJ Jamie Ranton for an evening of new wave protest music from 7pm to 2am at Kings College London Students Union, Macadam Buildings, Surrey Street, WC2R 2NS.
www.captainska.com

Celebration Day
Led Zeppelin
Out now in cinemas and multiple video and audio formats on November 19. Over two hours of music featuring legendary songs like Whole Lotta Love and Stairway To Heaven.
www.ledzeppelin.com

Grrr!
The Rolling Stones
Abkco Music & Records.
November 12. Price starts at £14.99
Celebrating 50 years with 50 of their greatest songs (80 tracks for a deluxe 4 CD version) from the ‘greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in the world’, including landmarks such as Big Ben in London, New York’s Empire State Building, Tokyo’s Skytree and the Sydney Opera House have been tagged with a variety of King Kong-style virtual 3D gorillas, modeled on the GRRR! cover.
You can download the free uView App on www.rollingstones.com

Books
The People Speak – A history of Britain told through the eyes of protesters
By David Horspool, Colin Firth, Anthony Arnove.
Canongate Books. £17.99. Through
www.amazon.co.uk or www.history.co.uk/the-people-speak
Keep Breathing
by Adam Grace (aka Frank Green), ex-Daily Telegraph journalist’s controversial thriller (August/ September Journalist).
The book is fiction, the issues are real. Available on Amazon £8.99 and Ebook on Kindle £2.99 or contact adamfgrace@gmail.com or blog adamfgrace@blogspot.com

PREVIEW
Joe’s legacy – Strummerville
Remember Joe Strummer on December 22
A decade after he died on December 22, 2002, the legacy of The Clash frontman, Joe Strummer, lives on in London’s Westway at the headquarters of Strummerville, the registered charity that helps people make music, gives a platform for unsigned bands to download music for free, works with other charities like WArtOut who support street youth and disadvantaged young people in Sierra Leone, got involved with the Strummerville Music Room at Tilmanu orphanage in Malawi where there is no formal musical education in schools, plus helped a former UK unlicensed radio broadcaster, Rinse FM, establish itself as a not-for-profit community radio station.
They have a Strummerville bus that bands can borrow for gigs, and rehearsal and songwriting rooms in Belfast and London as well as numerous projects in places like Liverpool, Dover and Bogota.
Friends and family of Joe set up Strummerville in the year after his death. www.strummerville.com

with presidential aspirations who tangle with one another.
www.thecampaignmovie.warnerbros.com

This House: A Westminster political drama
This: A Westminster political drama

‘Germs’ from the John Barlett exhibition
‘Germs’ from the John Barlett exhibition

Marking 10 years since Joe Strummer’s death
Marking 10 years since Joe Strummer’s death

Amazon £9.89
Spearheaded by BAFTA award winning actor Colin Firth and author and editor Anthony Arnove, it’s an international initiative retelling history through the voices of everyday people. An anthology of the dissenters and visionaries who challenged authority through speeches, letters and songs against everything from the Norman Conquest to the injustice of the Stephen Lawrence trial. Words that brought radical change in Britain politically and socially. The History Channel has a host of actors performing the stories on Sunday, October 31.
www.amazon.co.uk or www.history.co.uk/the-people-speak

‘Germs’ from the John Barlett exhibition
‘Germs’ from the John Barlett exhibition

Keep Breathing
by Adam Grace (aka Frank Green), ex-Daily Telegraph journalist’s controversial thriller (August/ September Journalist).
The book is fiction, the issues are real. Available on Amazon £8.99 and Ebook on Kindle £2.99 or contact adamfgrace@gmail.com or blog adamfgrace@blogspot.com
Catching the digital bus
Dave Toomer’s piece on the digital divide (Journalist August/September) is extremely timely. The Communications Consumer Panel has real concerns about this issue and has produced research and advice to help further progress. In 2010 the Panel developed the Consumer framework for digital participation that sets out what people say they need to get online and get the most out of the internet. This Framework fed directly into the previous Government’s National Plan for Digital Participation, and is now being used by a number of organisations including the RNIB.

Our most recent report, Bridging the gap, highlights that there is a serious risk that public policy underestimates the challenge of supporting people to get and stay online. We believe that, without action now to give people the skills and motivation to exploit the advantages of the internet, there is a risk that the digital divide will become a gulf, excluding a significant minority of people from online benefits and services. This has implications for funding and policy – but sustainable growth for the future can only be achieved if broadband is used by most consumers and businesses. The Communications Consumer Panel was set up under the 2003 Communications Act to protect and promote consumer and citizen interests in the communications sector. For information, visit www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk

Jo Connell
Chair, Communications Consumer Panel

Keeping the faith
I was disappointed that your feature on the future for the media industry (‘Always look on the bright side of life ...’ (June/July Journalist) was illustrated with a crucifixion.

While I realise that the picture was from the film ‘The Life of Brian’ and that no offence was necessarily intended, the Crucifixion is a central image in Christian belief and its gratuitous use for amusement is hurtful to many Christians. I believe a far more sensitive approach is taken to the images and tenets of other religions, and similar respect should be afforded to the death of the founder of Christianity.

Des Cryan
Life member, Dublin Broadcasting

The Joy of Seps
All this talk of the blight of ‘colour seps’ reminds me of my first experience after going over to the dark side many years ago.

To cut a long story medium-length: basic product release for security trade titles...accompanying pic, dark grey desktop microphone with big white ‘on’ button, all on a plain white background. Not one of the mags used it.

Re-sent it following month. Same release to same titles, same pic but with the ‘on’ button Photoshopped bright red. The seps requests soon came rolling in and our monochromatic mic’ with its digital lippy was the most famous in the land.

Chris Church
Barnoldswick

We won’t be pickled!
So Communities Secretary Eric Pickles is set to meet the Newspaper Society over council-run newspapers – one of his (and their) pet-hates.

Pickles will resume his crusade against local councils having the audacity to speak up for themselves and tell the public what they are doing. And groups belonging to the Newspaper Society will continue to cause self-inflicted harm by shedding more journalist jobs and keep wages down to a minimum. Blaming local council newspapers for their woes is an easy cop-out.

Local newspapers with no regular town hall newspaper or magazine are also in a pickle. With fewer reporters covering less news, they are losing more readers and making less profit as advertisers seek alternative ways to reach the public.

And our members face the risk of losing their jobs – either by local papers closing or if struggling councils cave in to Pickles and the Newspaper Society and shut down their own newspapers and journalistic jobs are axed.

In the meantime, NUJ members will strive to uphold the highest standards of ethical journalism and provide the best service they can for the public – whether they work for a cost-cutting newspaper group or a local authority beset by its own internal problems.

Nic Mitchell
Co-chair, PR & Communications Industrial Council

Welcome training
Thank you to the NUJ for the Getting Started as a Freelance course in June. It gave me the confidence to leave my full-time job in the summer and begin...
working as a freelance, which I had wanted to do for a long time.
It was also very practical: thanks to support from Humphrey Evans and Phil Sutcliffe, who ran the course, I have been able to negotiate confidently over contracts and put myself in a much better position than I would have been without their help.
I would absolutely recommend the course to anyone who is considering going freelance in the future.

Vicky Carr
Freelance journalist, Leeds

Happy with Larry
I would just like to take this opportunity to let you know how grateful I am for the efforts of Lawrence Shaw, NUJ Assistant Organiser for the North and Midlands. He recently represented me when the company for which I worked made my post redundant, and was a great source of help and advice during the consultancy period. Beyond that, his assistance was absolutely invaluable during the final meeting with the company, where, thanks to his excellent negotiating skills, the final settlement amount was considerably increased.
Once again I cannot commend his efforts highly enough, and will encourage as many ex-colleagues as possible to join the NUJ in order that they can receive similar help.

Andy Currington
Lancaster

I recently endured a bizarre sequence of events, whereby a sporting organisation to which I belong attempted to sanction me, over the publication of an article in the newspaper for which I work. The story related to information the organisation had passed to me, in my working capacity, which was then transferred to a journalistic colleague prior to print. The case was long, complex and disproportionately involved. However, the NUJ’s advice, support and guidance proved invaluable in successfully defending the charge.

I would especially like to express my gratitude to Assistant Regional Organiser Lawrence Shaw, South Yorkshire Branch Chair Julie Armstrong and fellow NUJ member Martin Fisher for their efforts in resolving this matter, to both my satisfaction and that of the profession.

Andrew Foley
South Yorkshire

Wrong image
Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate to use a picture of the Dowler family as one of the three illustrations in the NUJ’s Leveson Inquiry Special rather than one of Drs Kate and Gerry McCann?
The treatment of the Dowler family was outrageous and cannot be justified. The treatment of the McCanns is less clear-cut and I think it’s fair to say that opinions on this case differ both within the media and the general public.

Enid O’Dowd
Dublin Freelance Branch

Crudity continues
My criticism (June/July Journalist) of the crudity of Steve Bell’s cartoons (amply illustrated yet again in your August/September issue) obviously touched a raw nerve with Edward Davie, who came back with an attack on me in that edition.
After a 70-year membership of the NUJ, perhaps my views are a tad old fashioned by his apparently equally coarse standards, but surely we should be raising our sights, not lowering them?

Malcolm Race
Life member – Teesside

Collector’s item
I note that so far you have published two letters about Steve Bell’s cartoon strip. In June we had “Bell’s End?” opposing Steve’s work. In the August issue there was “Utter bollocks!” in Steve’s support. Looks to me like you now have a full set.

Mike Pentelow
PR & Communications Branch

STEVIE BELL

THE OWNERS
Clock is ticking on self-regulation

As he finalised his enormous report you can be sure one thing would have greatly irritated Lord Justice Leveson.

As he wrote his words of condemnation of the press the newspapers were presuming to know what was in his mind and making heavy-handed attempts to head off the political consequences.

The truth, to repeat an unfortunate phrase, was we actually did know what he was thinking, or were pretty sure we all did.

Anyone who has paid even passing attention to the extensive Leveson hearings would have heard his growing scepticism about the future of self-regulation of the press.

The only real question was whether it was going to be a case of legislation light, as in the case of mere recognition of the lines of the Irish model. The alternative was to have more extensive legal underpinning as there has, and always has been, for television in the UK.

Such a system would be just fine according to former BBC director-general Greg Dyke, who spent some of his formative years in local papers.

In her recent swan song as chief operating officer of the BBC Caroline Thomson pointedly berated Corporation staff for marrying each other, having in-house affairs and not getting out enough. But she also argued that something similar to current content regulation of broadcasting was probably “the right course” for the press.

It’s difficult to argue that British television current affairs have been enfeebled as a result of legislation or the activities of Ofcom, the communications regulator. If TV investigative journalism suffers from limitations they flow more from lack of will or resources than meddling politicians.

Advocating legal underpinning of self-regulation of the press as in the Irish model – the policy of the NUJ – is reasonable, rational and tough to argue against given the scale of press abuses revealed before Leveson. Yet almost against the grain of common sense the attempt must be made.

Leave aside the obvious, that the worst excesses by some sections of the newspaper industry were against the law and could and should have been dealt with by the law.

But the symbolic principle of a press free of specific statutory controls operating within the law remains something worth defending until it has been comprehensively demonstrated that there really is no alternative.

Try talking legal underpinning of press regulation to an American First Amendment lawyer.

Prime Minister David Cameron, who set up the Leveson inquiry so quickly and with such carelessly broad terms of references, would now do very well to pause and reflect on the Leveson recommendations. There should be one final period of grace with stated time limits. The aim would be to see whether publishers can implement an independent and robust self-regulatory system along the lines proposed by the Lords Hunt and Black underpinned by commercial contracts and fines.

If they fail then talk of principles however precious would have to fade before political and social realities.

Yet Cameron could well agree that in the internet age increasing the level of statutory regulation of the press would not only be counter-intuitive but positively bizarre – unless there really is no alternative.

raymond.snoddy@gmail.com

“"It's difficult to argue that British television current affairs have been enfeebled as a result of legislation or the activities of Ofcom"

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Not only is the government chipping away at everyone’s rights at work, ministers are making it impossibly expensive for many to enforce rights that they would not dare to attack outwardly, such as the minimum wage.

It’s one employment law for the rich, another for the rest of us.

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