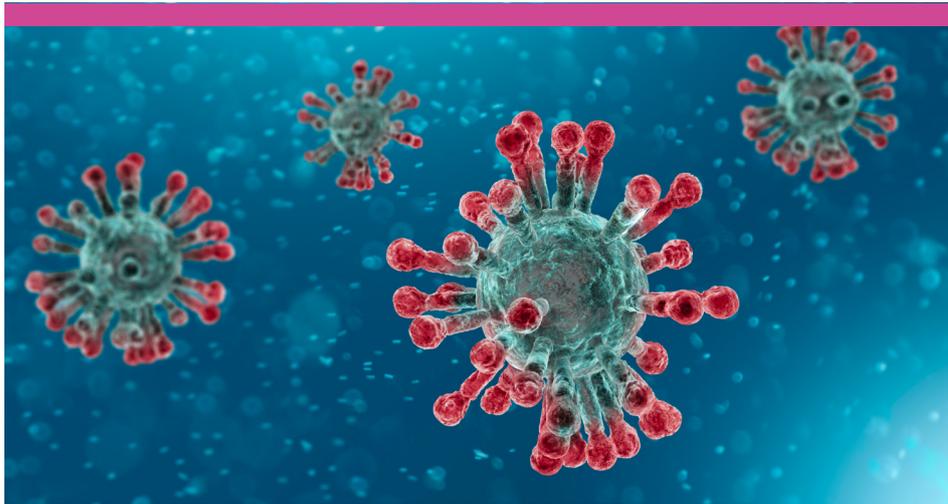


NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Informed

issue 33 Nov 2020

An unprecedented year for the NUJ



It was the last meeting of the year for the union's national executive committee (NEC) – and what a year it has been for the industry, the union and everyone's lives.

As the coronavirus' second wave battered the globe, England went into a second lockdown, following the greater restrictions imposed by the rest of the UK, Ireland and Europe. Newspaper industry leaders said they were braced for another freefall in advertising, just as fortunes appeared to be on the turn following the depredations caused by the first lockdown.

The NEC praised the work of union officials who had spent recent months dealing with redundancies across all sectors. More than 2,000 job losses are at risk at the BBC, a further 1,000 across local and national newspapers, and thousands of freelances have had work cancelled and seen commissions dry up.

The Chancellor's extensions to the

furlough scheme to March (reviewable in January) and announcement of a third self-employed income support grant came too late for many. Rishi Sunak also failed to use this opportunity to remedy his lack of support for the many freelances who had fallen through the cracks of the financial aid schemes. That is why the union is launching its #FairDeal4Freelances campaign for better rights and protection for the self-employed, calling on the government and companies to stop giving freelances such a shabby deal.

Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, told the NEC the union's News Recovery Plan to help the industry out of the crisis was gaining traction. Ministers and officials at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport have held discussions over the NUJ's three-pronged tax credit proposal to undo the damage caused by Covid-19 and to reboot the media industry with public interest

journalism at its heart: tax credits for Jobs for Journalists, for local businesses taking out advertising, and for people taking out print or digital news subscriptions.

The Scottish government set up a short-term working party to examine the future of public interest journalism and the Welsh culture and communications committee took evidence from the NUJ on supporting the media. The Welsh Executive Council is holding a town hall event on Wednesday 9 December to discuss a recovery plan for Wales with Michelle and actor and activist Michael Sheen.

The general secretary and Seamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, made a presentation of the Northern Ireland Recovery Plan to junior ministers at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy Minister. In the Republic of Ireland, after much lobbying, a working journalist and, as it happens an NUJ member, was appointed to the Media Commission (page 6).

John Barsby, honorary treasury, told the NEC that finances were stable albeit with constrained underlying circumstances. The combination of robust recruitment in workplaces undergoing consultations over job losses, savings from having to move the union's work and business online and distributing *The Journalist* digitally had helped offset increases to the union's pension deficit programme and reduced rent from tenants in Headland House.

Another important piece of the union's work has been taking part in the government's National Committee for the Safety of Journalists; a survey of members showed the startling levels of violence and abuse experienced by members (page 4). This, together with a set of recommendations, formed a hard-hitting report which will feed into the committee's action plan.

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NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

Michelle Says



Despite being a union of communicators, it would be fair to say that sometimes we're not fulsome enough in trumpeting our many successes and wins.

After lots of hard work and organisation on the part of Local Democracy Reporters across Newsquest, the Central Arbitration Committee decided this week to grant NUJ recognition without the need for a ballot of members.

It's a great result, and means that Chris Morley, the NUJ's Northern and Midlands Senior Organiser who has led the effort along with our reps, can focus on populating and agreeing the recognition agreement over the coming weeks – a house agreement that acknowledges that LDRs across the business are a distinct bargaining unit that will have rights to negotiate over

pay, hours and conditions from now on in. Our members and reps deserve praise for their doggedness and determination, ploughing on in the face of the usual shenanigans from the company, to achieve this victory.

Something positive to focus on is the launch this month of our new campaign for a Fair Deal for Freelances – with its ten point Charter, this is the NUJ's response to the unvarnished failures of the government to cast its safety net across all workers during this crisis. Never has it been clearer that reforms are needed for freelances. This campaign will be a vital one, and something that all NUJ members, whatever their employment status, should support.

The need for freelances to have the best chance of getting work and commissions back up and running is something we've highlighted in the course of our discussions with government, over the need to grant quarantine exemptions for journalists having to cross borders in the course of their work. Despite support from DCMS it's been a slog getting traction with the Cabinet office but we're hopefully heading in the right direction. We've proposed using the UK Press card and the IFJ press card as a key mechanism in identifying appropriate newsgatherers who could qualify for such an exemption.

The important role of the press card – and with that, the need for journalists to use it appropriately – has been reaffirmed during this crisis. When officers at the recent lockdown protest in London wrongly told reporters and photographers that if they didn't have authority from the Met press office, they would be treated as members of the public at an illegal gathering – the NUJ sprang into action. Within hours we held a meeting with the Met, and liaised with the National Police Chiefs Council – receiving assurances that fresh guidance would be issued to all police officers to remind them of the vital role of the media, and to ensure that our members can go about their work unimpeded.

We've reminded all newsgatherers to carry their press card, and print off the NPCC guidelines from the NUJ's website to serve as a reminder to any officers who claim not to have seen the memo.

All those newsgatherers who have kept the show on the road throughout lockdown and ongoing government restrictions across the NUJ's nations and regions deserve our collective thanks, not least for reinforcing the role of journalists in the suite of essential public sector workers.

“Something positive to focus on is the launch this month of our new campaign for a Fair Deal for Freelances – with its ten-point Charter, the NUJ's response to the unvarnished failures of the government to cast its safety net across all workers during this crisis.”

That's why we're continuing to lobby hard around all of the measures contained within the NUJ's News Recovery Plan.

We've been brilliantly supported in that by the new chair of the NUJ's Parliamentary Group, Grahame Morris MP, who has been working hard to raise awareness of our plan, and seeking meetings to build support for the changes we're seeking. A meeting of the group is planned later this month to set out our key priorities. As well as our work on safety and the Freelance Charter, a significant focus will be on protecting public service broadcasting.

A recent financial presentation from BBC management made for gloomy listening, not least the widening Covid-19 funding gap which means the already massive £800million cuts programme has grown to £1billion. News this week that take up of TV licences for the over-75s is also slow will be no doubt be inducing panic that income will be further compromised. Already the way in which the cuts are happening risk undermining quality news and journalism – particularly across BBC England where cuts are taking place across frontline newsgathering roles. A global pandemic has underscored just how important trustworthy news and information is – our public service broadcaster has shown how critical its role has been, and yet we are witnessing cuts that risk compromising what it does best. A well-resourced BBC, free from political interference and influence, is an economic driver for the broader creative industries – a sector on its knees right now – and part of the solution in tackling disinformation and fake news.

As well as protecting public service broadcasting, a key overarching plank in the Recovery Plan is the need for the tech giants to finally pay their way. I think it's fair to say that in initial conversations around this with politicians and policymakers, there was a fair degree of scepticism about the likelihood of that demand being met. However, it strikes me that this is changing and the political will is beginning to build. I'll be working on developing our approach in this area in the coming weeks. NUJ members engaging in lobbying around the plan can help, by reiterating this call in all the discussions taking place around the union's nations and regions. The tech giants are almost unique in having had a very good crisis – building a consensus around it being time for them to pay their fair share shouldn't just attract supporters of tax justice, it should appeal to every politician's sense of fairness and common sense.

Delegate Meeting

As the virus increased its grip it soon became clear that April's DM would have to be postponed. As time has gone on, it is clear that the only way to hold a meeting – which draws delegates from all parts of the union, across multiple jurisdictions, with differing restrictions and quarantine regulations in place – is to hold it virtually.

The union's Standing Orders Committee, with help from a report by chair of Finance Chris Frost, has been exploring the practicalities of a virtual DM. Rather than simply recreate the core business of the conference, we have decided to see it as an opportunity to do something different and more innovative. Rather than a death-by-Zoom event, we are hoping to hold a series of virtual activities over a week in Spring with the aim of bringing our DM to the wider union. The advantage of this is that will open up debate, discussion and networking far and wide, rather than a smaller number of delegates spending a long weekend in Southport.

We all experienced a virtual TUC Congress and have had constructive discussions with the National Education Union over their recent virtual conference of 800 participants – their investment in a bespoke weighted voting system is one that they're willing to make available to sister unions which will massively help in our planning.

The core business of the DM of making decisions which set policy for the forthcoming cycle will be timetabled in manageable sections, perhaps over two days. The bulk of motions can be adopted in accordance with standing orders, leaving a core group of about 38, plus late notice motions, to be voted on. The weighted voting system would also deal with the various elections that take place in the course of DM.

That would leave us able to approach the usual DM agenda differently and



Delegates at Southport DM 2018

Paul Herrmann

in ways that reach out to the wider membership more effectively, including fringe meetings on a range of topics, our celebration of Members of Honour and union sectoral meetings.

We aim to programme a range of events and initiatives, ideally over the course of a week, building on work done for previous Local News Matters weeks, and before that Standing up for Journalism events. It could be under a broad banner of, say, A Media Reimagined, following on from the News Recovery Plan.

We would invite branches and chapels to host particular events – widening the pool of participation and providing an opportunity to highlight the excellent work and victories they've been driving over the past year. Our work on international solidarity and safety could be properly showcased, with participation from sister unions around the world who ordinarily cannot be with us in person. Other high-profile speakers may be able to be secured in the same vein, with an appearance via Zoom or pre-recorded contribution an easier form of commitment than a schlep to the north-west.

Our fund-raising events and socials or even another comedy night, such as the Mark Thomas concert, could also take place virtually, this time with a much wider NUJ audience.

We'll also showcase a package of training seminars and professional skills sessions, including collective bargaining and organising remote workers, and mental health and wellbeing training.

News Update

Survey showing violence to NUJ members will inform safety plan

One in five journalists who took part in an NUJ survey said they had been physically assaulted while doing their job, with 27 per cent saying they had been threatened with violence.

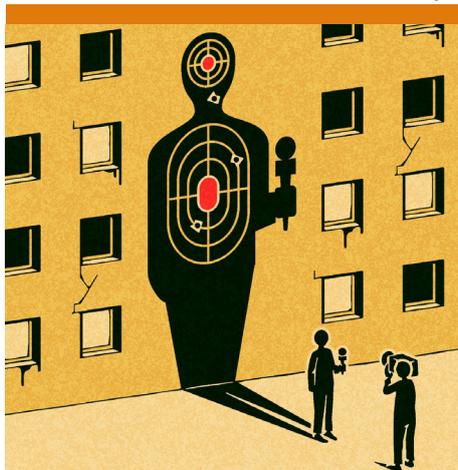
Michelle Stanistreet said: "Such abuse and harassment goes beyond the awful personal impact - it also risks silencing journalists and censoring debates."

Those surveyed reported knife attacks, firebombs thrown at their homes and been punched, pushed or kicked. Others were spat at, had eggs thrown at them and their addresses published on social media platforms. The perpetrators of the violence and threats included paramilitary members, the police, security guards, far-right demonstrators, members of the public, political "minders" and criminals.

More than half (55 per cent) said the abuse had affected their mental health and well-being and they had been forced to make changes to the way they worked, with 19 per cent saying they moved address. More than half (51 per cent) said they had received online abuse in the past year, with one in five experiencing it on daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Journalists were vulnerable when covering sectarian activity, demonstrations, football and, increasingly, court cases, with members being threatened for reporting the sentences of rapists.

Those surveyed agreed the political polarisation caused by Brexit, the Scottish referendum and the coarsening of public discourse in the UK had had an adverse impact on the safety of journalists. The failure of social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to stop the abuse led to journalists being seen as fair game. Most respondents agreed that disinformation and fake



news undermined trust in journalism and increased hostility towards journalists.

A third of those surveyed said employers could do more to protect journalists at work. Patricia Devlin, a crime reporter working for Belfast's Sunday World newspaper, complained to the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland after the police failed adequately to investigate a serious threat made to her, despite her supplying the name of the perpetrator. She said that, as a journalist exposing criminals and paramilitaries, she became used to being threatened: "But, when I received a threat to rape my new-born baby, also identifying my grandmother and the location of where the sender believed she lived, I'd had enough," she said.

The NUJ and Amnesty are supporting Patricia's her case and her details, plus the survey, were used to compile a report for the government's National Committee for the Safety and Protection of Journalists - the NUJ general secretary is a member of the committee drawing up an action plan and it will be discussing proposed measures such as:

- Collaborate in an industry-wide

annual survey of journalists, supported by employers and the NUJ.

- Create and host a free online toolkit/support pack for journalists.

- Engage with the UK police and NCTJ to review training offered and improve understanding of the safety challenges facing journalists.

- Explore how to support an emergency safety fund for journalists.

On the international day (2 November) to end impunity for crimes against journalists the International Federation of Journalist demanded governments take urgent steps to put an end to that impunity and protect press freedom. In the past decade almost 1,000 journalists have been killed (30 this year).

Key findings

- 21% of respondents reported physical assaults or attacks and 27 per cent said they had been physically threatened.

- 51 % said they had experienced online abuse in the past year.

- 78 % said "abuse and harassment has become normalised and seen as part of the job".

- 55 % said the abuse had affected their wellbeing and mental health.

- 96 % said that abuse and harassment risked silencing journalists and censoring debate.

- 94 % agreed the polarisation of debate and public discourse in the UK put journalists at risk and that politicians had a role in defending press freedom.

- 93 % said social media platforms did little to deter and stop abuse.

- 33 % agreed employers could do more to protect journalists at work.

Survey details: www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-safety-report-2020/

News Update

Action at BBC threatened

A national meeting of over 90 BBC M/FoCs were told to go back to their chapels and prepare for industrial action over compulsory redundancies at the corporation.

In the latest round of cuts, 2,000 people are set to leave the broadcaster. Paul Siegert, national broadcasting officer, said there were a couple of dozen people who had not been redeployed who face being made compulsorily redundant from January.

It is the union's policy to take industrial action over compulsory redundancies at the BBC. The meeting heard examples from many chapels of individuals who had been refused voluntary redundancy

and cases of botched redeployment.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "This meeting offers full support and solidarity to all members facing compulsory redundancy and reaffirms its standing policy to take all action, including strike action if necessary, to defend that principle." The NEC gave contingency authority for industrial action.

BBC members have voiced concerns that the sheer scale of the cuts – 450 jobs, one in six, are going in the English regions – will have a severe impact on the corporation's remit as a public service broadcaster, and investigative journalism would be a casualty. One rep said: "We have lost some damn good journalists."

The M/FoCs were also asked to discuss whether to challenge the BBC's corporation-wide pay freeze with their chapels.

Michelle Stanistreet said the unions had not been consulted over the BBC's new social media guidelines, which had caused an outcry across chapels, and a forthcoming meeting was planned with director general Tim Davie. Following their publication the BBC was forced to insist that the DG had not meant people working for the BBC could not support Pride marches (see page 10). Meanwhile, consultation has started on the future of the cost of the TV licence following 2022.

Equality watchdog's BBC report was "a whitewash"

When hundreds of women made unequal pay claims following publication of a 2017 list of top BBC earners showing two-thirds were men, the equal pay watchdog was called in to investigate.

But there was disbelief, when the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported this month that the BBC was not guilty of unlawful discrimination. Its report said individual cases had been investigated and cited the importance of a tribunal's finding in favour of the unequal pay claim brought by presenter Samira Ahmed, right with Michelle.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "There will be many NUJ members who read

this report and feel it doesn't address their lived experiences. The fact that so many individual settlements, including Samira Ahmed's NUJ-backed tribunal win, have taken place underlines the clear problems that have existed. And, where settlements have been agreed, it's taken an enormous amount of effort and persistence on the part of individuals determined to hold the BBC to account."

BBC reps echoed Carrie

Gracie, the former BBC China editor who won backpay after finding she was paid less than the male international editors, who said: "The report feels like whitewash".

The report concluded that the BBC's recent pay structure reforms had resolved problems caused by its former complex and decentralised remuneration scheme where managers had too much discretion over an individual's pay. The corporation was criticised for the slowness of its complaints procedures and Caroline Waters, interim chair of the EHRC, said: "It is easy to see why trust

between some women at the BBC and the organisation has broken down." Women were not listened to and the process "took a heavy emotional toll".

Michelle Stanistreet said the BBC needed to heed the report and address outstanding issues such as pay progression, great transparency and the gaps and overlaps in the new pay bands, with the unions as a matter of urgency. The ERHC said there should be equal pay audits every five years.

The result was a relief for BBC management, as it appointed former Court of Appeal president Lord Dyson to investigate allegations that religion editor Martin Bashir, currently unwell after contracting Covid-19, secured his famous Panorama interview with Princess Diana by subterfuge.



Tim Dawson

News Update

Commission on Irish media finally launched

A commission on the future of the Irish media has finally got down to work.

The original make-up of the commission, chaired by Dr Brian MacCraith, recently-retired president of Dublin City University, was heavily criticised for the exclusion of NUJ representation and the absence of relevant Irish media industry and experts in journalism education.

That deficit has been rectified with the appointment of Siobhan Holliman, co-chair of the union's executive council and NUJ representative on the Press Council of Ireland.

While Siobhan has been appointed in her own right, her contribution will reflect her experience as a newspaper journalist and trade unionist with a particular knowledge of the regional media, print and broadcasting.

The commission is due to report in September 2021. The NUJ's Irish Executive Council (IEC) is seeking submissions from branches, chapters and individual members in preparing the NUJ submission to the commission.

It began life as the Commission on the Future of Public Service Broadcasting, with the appointment of Prof MacCraith as chair announced on December 10 2019 by the then minister Richard Bruton stating it would report by September of this year.



No further action was taken on establishing of the commission until after the general election. The NUJ successfully argued that the terms of reference of the commission should be broadened to include the future of all media.

The decision of the new government to take on board the NUJ call, combined with removing responsibility for media policy from the sprawling Department for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment appears to represent a more strategic approach to media policy. The NUJ voiced concerns at the impossible workload involved in a Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

On November 17, a union delegation led by Dara Brady, co-chair of the NUJ's IEC, with Siobhan held a virtual meeting with minister Catherine Martin to stress the need for a stimulus package for the meeting in line with the union's News Recovery Plan.

Earlier this month, Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary, addressed the parliamentary committee dealing with media matters warning it that urgent intervention was needed to address the multi-faceted crisis in the industry.

He also reminded TDs and senators that last March the union called for a forum on the crisis facing the media industry and that as far back as September 2014 the NUJ requested for the establishment of a government commission on the future of the media in a submission to a Broadcasting Authority of Ireland seminar, *Ensuring Plurality in the Digital Age*. The commission will make recommendations on the role and financing of public service broadcaster RTE.

Save union learning

The government has announced it is to scrap the Union Learning Fund which finances union-led training in England in April. This affects Federation of Entertainment Unions Training which is one of the few places freelancers can access free workshops and webinars to help with their professional careers and to acquire business skills. Thousands of journalists are

losing their staff jobs and will become self-employed; FEU Training offers a vital bridge to make that change. **Sign the petition to get decision overturned: <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/uk-gov-don-t-cut-union-learning>**

Parliamentary Group Grahame Morris, Labour MP for Easington, has become the co-chair of the NUJ

Parliamentary Group with Lib Dem peer Baroness Jane Bonham-Carter. Grahame has already promoted the union's News Recovery Plan in Parliament, and the union will be briefing the group on the BBC, the #FairDeal4Freelance campaign, the journalists' safety report and the Undercover Policing Inquiry, which revealed police officers had spied on journalists.

Press cards

After incidents at an anti-lockdown demonstration in London, the union received assurances from police chiefs that the media's role as key workers and newsgatherers would be respected by their officers. Journalists should carry their NUJ UK press card and a copy of the press-police Covid-19 protocol. Press card holders must use them only when they are working.

News Update

Harold Evans (1928-2020)

Tim Dawson pays tribute to the buccaneering journalist

Two years ago, Harry Evans visited the union's headquarters for an NUJ Extra fundraising event. Three former colleagues from his editorship days in Darlington travelled south to catch up with their old boss. Within a heartbeat, Harry, almost 90 at the time, recalled their names before heaping praise on stories they had submitted more than half a century earlier.

The reverence he attracts among journalists is rooted in the energy and innovation he brought to creating newspapers. His triumphs were the ground-breaking stories at the Sunday Times: thalidomide and its victims; the exposure of Kim Philby; and publication of Richard Crossman's diaries. Less celebrated was his interest in domestic

mores and social issues; Jilly Cooper was as integral to his Sunday Times as was Phillip Knightley and the Insight team.

The son of a Manchester railwayman, he entered the inky trade as a 16-year-old reporter on an Ashton-under-Lyne weekly. He won a place at the University of Durham and by 1952 returned to journalism at the Manchester Evening News. His first editorship at Darlington's Northern Echo (1961-67) was marked by campaigning national stories that few regional titles have matched since – pushing for NHS cervical tests and the pardoning of Timothy Evans who was wrongly convicted and hanged for murder.

It was his brush with Rupert Murdoch, set out in his book, *Good Times Bad Times*, that placed his integrity beyond

question. The Australian mogul bought Times newspapers in 1981 and moved Evans to the daily. They quickly clashed over his coverage of the newly elected Margaret Thatcher and he left.

He reinvented himself after arriving in Manhattan, becoming a power couple

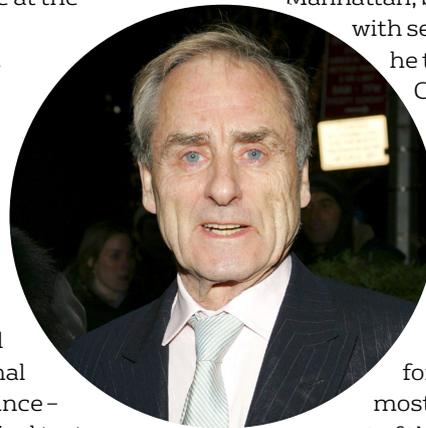
with second wife Tina Brown – he taught at Yale, founded

Condé Nast Traveller and was president of Random House. He inspired journalist generations to come with his manuals on the craft of news writing and design.

He will be remembered for making newspapers the most relevant and exciting

part of the media just as they faced serious challenge from television.

And throughout it all, his torrent of energy and ideas kept colleagues and friends panting to keep up until the very end. It is unlikely he will ever be equalled as a newspaper editor.



Everett Collection/Inc / Alamy/Stock Photo

Assange fate hangs in the balance

Julian Assange will most likely take his own life, if he is convicted, an online meeting attended by nearly 100 NUJ activists heard.

Jen Robinson, lawyer to the Wikileaks founder, told members her client "had hardly been able to hold a conversation when he was in solitary confinement in Belmarsh".

The meeting provided an update on the extradition

hearing and called on journalists to campaign for his release. Former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger said: "The move to extradite Julian Assange is disturbing – as is the mute response among journalists. If we allow him to be convicted, it will have huge implications for anyone who wants to do investigative journalism."

NEC member Tim Dawson, who observed the extradition

hearing on behalf of the union and the IFJ, said: "The Espionage Act of 1917 under which he is charged has far more often been used to prosecute trade unions and working class leaders than it has spies. It is a discretionary



cosh used to harass civic activists. Extending its scope to journalists, as this prosecution would, is a terrifying prospect."

Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary and meeting chair, said: "The barbarous treatment of Julian Assange, whose sin has been to expose truth, means that this is an issue with which journalists cannot become bored. He must not be extradited."

A demonstration has been arranged outside the Old Bailey for the ruling on Monday 4 January.

Tim Dawson

Freelances

#FairDeal4Freelances

Support our charter for self-employed rights

Jan is a freelance writer. She had a contract for a magazine column, a couple of newspapers gave her regular commissions and she sold her interviews of the movers, shakers and innovators in the business world.

The freelancing life suited her; she was able to work around her childcare especially when they were young. Magazines folded and commissioning editors came and went, but she always found other work, even taking on some copy writing in the corporate world.

But the pandemic stopped all that. Much of her work disappeared and now for the first time since being a student she is worrying about the bills. Fortunately, her partner is still working, but without her earnings things are tight. The government was offering financial aid, but not to her.

Jan's plight is very similar to the many members contacting the union's freelance office saying: "I am running out of money and struggling to pay bills and rent. I'm anxious, sleepless and short of money. It's made me realise that we are on our own. The government doesn't care about us."

Covid-19 laid bare the precarious position of a major section of the UK's employed sector, particularly in the media where a third are freelance.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak rode to the rescue with a Covid-19 job support scheme which completely left out the self-employed. Following intense lobbying from trade unions he later followed up with the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, but so many

freelances found they fell through the gaps in both packages.

The NUJ, TUC and other unions pleaded with the Chancellor to put things right. Keir Starmer, Labour Party leader, and SNP Westminster leader, Ian Blackford, took up the issue at Prime Minister's Questions. Boris Johnson's non-answer came as a slap in the face to the self-employed without a safety net.

The problem has been the piecemeal employment law that leaves the self-employed vulnerable to employers placing them on unsuitable employment terms. They pay their taxes, but have no right to holidays, sick, parental or pregnancy leave. The government-commissioned Taylor Review set out to explore the tax and employment rights of freelances, but its recommendations have been largely ignored. The NUJ has urged the government to align the employment status framework with the tax status framework.

The severe hardship caused by Covid-19 for the self-employed means this is a problem that must now be addressed. The UK economy and the media sector are heavily reliant on freelances, so why are they getting such a shabby deal? That is why the union has launched its #FairDeal4Freelances campaign to seek redress and to ensure the right to protection and benefits is not dependent on employment status.

Pamela Morton, national freelance officer said: "The #FD4F campaign will continue to seek redress for those missing out on Covid-19 aid, and will fight for a radical reform of our rights."

Join the campaign

#FairDeal4Freelances includes a charter of freelance rights which sets out the benefits the self-employed should also enjoy.

It calls for the right to organise in a trade union, to have a written contract with fair terms and conditions, prompt payment and equal treatment at work in terms of health and safety. Freelances should get holiday pay, parental leave and allowances and a retirement pension. They should have the right to resist companies forcing them on to PAYE, to incorporate as a limited company, or work under umbrella companies.

The campaign will be asking employers, employer organisations, industry bodies, politicians and individual supporters to sign up to its aims. Pamela Morton, national freelance officer, said: "For too long the self-employed have been second-class citizens in the world of work. We're only asking for a fair deal." The campaign will involve working with chapels to ensure that freelances and casuals have voting rights and full participation in union activities. They should be able to have a rep accompany them to disciplinary and grievance hearings, be included in voluntary recognition agreements and collective bargaining and offered workplace training. Freelances will agree not to cover for those taking industrial action.

Branches will be encouraged to have a freelance officer who can advise and represent freelance members.

FREELANCE RIGHTS CHARTER

FAIR DEAL FOR FREELANCES

The Covid-19 crisis has further marginalised already vulnerable freelances working across the media industry – this NUJ Freelance Rights Charter demands improved protections and benefits regardless of employment status.

Support our call for a Fair Deal for Freelances, where all freelances have the right to:

- 1** Trades union collective bargaining to improve terms and conditions for freelances side by side with staff
- 2** Fair written contracts free from the threat of disadvantage for asserting their rights
- 3** Respect for their creators' rights and unwaivable moral rights
- 4** Equalised rights with employees including; sick pay; maternity, paternity and parental leave; unemployment benefit; full access to benefits and social securities
- 5** Choice over how they freelance and are taxed, with an end to advance tax payments
- 6** Work free from pressure to operate on a PAYE basis, or to incorporate, or work through umbrella companies
- 7** Equal health and safety protections including parity of training, insurances and security provision
- 8** Fair fees and terms, and prompt payments
- 9** Dignity and respect at work, free from bullying, harassment or discrimination, with parity of access to grievance procedures
- 10** Equal professional rights, including the right to protect sources, seek information and uphold ethical standards

#FairDeal4Freelances

#FairDeal4Freelances

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www.nuj.org.uk

Spotlight

Maintaining a balanced news

Matt Kenyon



Director general Tim Davie says impartiality is the essence of the BBC. Ian Burrell looks at his new social media guidelines

“The first thing that happens to you as a BBC journalist,” Andrew Marr once told a seminar, “is that you’re taken down into a dank basement to have your trousers pulled down and your organs of opinion removed with a pair of secateurs by the director general and popped in a formaldehyde bottle. You’re told you’re allowed them back when you leave.”

The BBC’s star interviewer spoke those

words in 2006 at an event hosted by BBC governors called “Impartiality: Fact or Fiction”. Those were different times, before the explosion of social media and before Brexit. Today the debate over BBC impartiality is back shaping the future of British broadcasting – and a new director general has arrived with a sharpened set of secateurs.

In his introductory speech in September, Tim Davie listed “impartiality” as his “number one priority” and the “very essence” of the BBC. “Our research shows that too many perceive us to be shaped by a particular perspective,” he warned.

Within weeks the BBC published far-reaching impartiality guidelines, threatening staff with the sack if they failed to comply. They were told never to break stories on their personal media accounts, to avoid “virtue signalling” by liking other posts and to be wary of using emojis. They should never support campaigns on social media – “no matter how apparently worthy the cause” – and must “not participate in public demonstrations”, nor “become the face of a charity”.

Paul Siegert, the NUJ’s national broadcasting organiser, says the guidelines provoked a lot of anger among staff: “They feel being journalists at the BBC shouldn’t prevent them from speaking out on subjects they feel passionately about. These are professional people and just because they have a personal view about something doesn’t mean that is going to taint the way that they report a story.”

Outside the BBC, the furore over impartiality has – inevitably – provoked a range of responses.

Marcus Ryder, a former BBC news executive and visiting professor in media diversity at Birmingham City University Centre, told NUJ Informed that the guidelines were “fit for heterosexual, able-bodied, white men” but failed to take account of the “protected characteristics” – including disability, sexuality and race – enshrined in the Equality Act 2010. “A gay person attending a Pride rally is very

different to someone attending a Brexit rally," he said.

Davie later issued a clarification, saying BBC journalists could attend Pride, provided they "do not get involved in matters which could be deemed political or controversial".

Others are apparently enthused by the crackdown. Robbie Gibb, head of BBC political programmes until he left to work in Downing Street in 2017, was "delighted" by Davie's impartiality drive. Yet Gibb is linked to GB News, a planned channel described (by The Guardian 29 Aug 2020) as a Fox News-style opinionated current affairs TV station.

The face of GB News is Andrew Neil, who recently quit as the BBC's chief political interviewer. He says it will target "a huge gap in the market" made up of the "vast number of British people who feel underserved and unheard by" existing news channels. GB News would test the due impartiality regulations overseen by Ofcom by emulating the presenter-led approach of American networks. Neil says that Ofcom has a "quite liberal" approach to impartiality and that Channel 4 News "clearly has a particular ideological position".

Ben De Pear, editor of Channel 4 News, told NUJ Informed that this was not true. He said his programme's journalistic vigour had caused it to be shunned by politicians from all major parties, notably Labour under its previous leader. "Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour leadership thought we were too right-wing and too difficult in our interviews," he says. "When politicians don't like greater scrutiny, longer interviews and investigations, they tend to blame the organisation as being ideologically opposed to them. We are scrupulous in finding balance every single night and it's harder when politicians won't appear."

The British broadcast news establishment also faces a challenge from Rupert Murdoch's News UK, which plans a TV news channel that builds on its quarrelsome talkRADIO outlet.

For four months it has nibbled at BBC

Radio 4 and BBC Radio 5 Live with a new product, Times Radio, which gives an audio outlet to The Times and Sunday Times news brands. Former editor of The Times Literary Supplement, Stig Abell, who set up the station and co-presents its breakfast show, claims "the BBC historically gets itself in knots" over impartiality. "What you don't want is automaton presenters who just ask questions as if they are somehow floating ephemerally above the fray. Nobody is above the fray! Coronavirus really brings that home. I understand the need for balance and not to proselytise about certain issues, but there's nothing in the rules on impartiality that you can't say 'this happened to me yesterday and I feel this way about it'."

The idea that the BBC is failing is at odds with the audience engagement it has enjoyed during the pandemic. One

"Journalists at the BBC said they shouldn't be prevented from speaking out on subjects they feel passionately about"

member of the BBC newsroom said the planned rivals were not a threat. "The statistics don't lie – the public are coming to us in unprecedented numbers because the BBC remains the medium of choice for most of Britain."

But the BBC faces a perilous year, with growing numbers of unpaid licence fees (encouraged by the prospect of decriminalisation of non-paying offenders), massive staff cuts and a yet-to-be-appointed chair who may not have the organisation's best interests at heart.

Throughout its history the BBC has agonised over impartiality. In 1936, when the parliamentary committee led by Lord Ullswater considered the first renewal of the BBC's charter, it noted a journalistic tendency to focus on social change over

"orthodoxy and stability", saying "the reiteration of what exists and is familiar is not so interesting as the exposition of what might be".

In 2007 a BBC impartiality review led by author and filmmaker, John Bridcut, sought modernisation by advocating a "wagon wheel" of opinions in place of the traditional left-right "see-saw".

Five years later, former ITV chief, Stuart Prebble, was commissioned to examine the subject again. David Jordan, the BBC's long-standing director of editorial policy and standards, told that review that people with "socially authoritarian" views felt excluded from the BBC. It was Jordan – recently involved in an impartiality controversy that saw presenter Naga Munchetty censured for criticising Donald Trump – who oversaw the latest BBC impartiality guidelines. Prebble's review, published in 2013, well before Brexit, challenged metropolitan liberal group-think at the BBC and said coverage of immigration needed to "seek out opinions which 'people like us' may find unpalatable".

Looking back now, Prebble told NUJ Informed his review was not prescient but "complacent" and that the BBC and other mainstream outlets had been almost overwhelmed by the rapid polarisation of news. "I just feel that battle is lost and it is reflected up to, and including, no-platforming at universities and people going to news sources that will only say things they already agree with," he says.

"The review was only seven years ago and what has happened since is unrecognisable. I do think we failed to foresee, but I think we could be forgiven because I don't think anybody could have foreseen, unless it was Aldous Huxley."

Even so, he says, the fractured news landscape does make the importance of the BBC greater than ever and the director general is right to keep struggling for impartiality. "I think the BBC just needs to do everything possible to hang on to that and the band needs to go on playing even as the waters lap around its ears," he said.

News Update

Rock against Racism

Tim Dawson recalls his teenage initiation to David King's iconic agitprop

Like many 1970s teenagers, a postal order dispatched to Finsbury Park, London, initiated my engagement with politics. I received by return several sheets of lapel stickers, a poster and some leaflets. All bore a five-point star enclosing the words **ROCK AGAINST RACISM**.

As Rick Poynor's new book establishes, the graphic identity of the 70s and 80s Left was largely the work of this one designer - David King who died in 2016. As well as his RAR and Anti-Nazi League logos, many international solidarity campaigns and various left newspapers all owed their typographic signatures to King.

His work for the NUJ has never been bettered - King designed strike posters and the recruitment series based on classic film stills that hang in our offices. Agitprop was only one side of King, however. From 1965 to 1975 as designer of The Sunday Times magazine, he pioneered an approach to words and pictures that is imitated yet. He designed book covers, album sleeves and was an internationally recognised curator of early Soviet graphics.

Rick Poynor's beautifully-produced monograph wonderfully reflects King's work and is an evocative transport to the days when the off-set litho appeared to be history's locomotive.

David King Designer Activist Visual Historian, by Rick Poynor. Yale University Press £30.



**SORRY FRIENDS,
I'M STICKING TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT!
SUPPORT THE NUJ!**

Design: David King

ONE JOURNALIST STRIKE-BREAKING IS ONE TOO MANY!



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