



# September 2020 Branch

*Welcome to the September edition of NUJ Branch. Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, reports on the virtual TUC Congress, commends members at Bullivant for their principled action and looks at the NUJ's campaigns for this autumn.*

**E**nsuring that the so-called "new normal" is one where the role of journalism in our communities and democracy is supported and prized is vital, as we work to stave off cuts and job losses in workplaces at the same time as stepping up building support for our News Recovery Plan to reboot and revitalise our industry.

Striking NUJ members at Bullivant have been doing just that – rightly garnering support and solidarity from across the trade union movement in their inspiring fight for editorial standards and fair treatment at work, a dispute that has also served to highlight the need to fight for better pay and support for local newspapers.

Reconfiguring the economy and society in a way that strengthens our vital public services – of which journalism is part – was a recurrent feature in debates and motions passed at TUC Congress this week. It was Congress but not as we know it. This was the first to take place virtually, with thousands of trade unionists tuning in to the livestreamed sessions from their homes. With remarkably few technological glitches, TUC business ran smoothly.

The NUJ finance committee will meet at the end of this month and discuss ways in which we could hold our own virtual DM, having learned lessons from Congress and from other unions such as the education union NEU which has developed a platform to allow for weighted voting alongside a video platform. We will update branches and

tabling bodies as soon as we can.

In nominating me onto the TUC Executive Committee, Frances O'Grady paid tribute to the role of journalists in our democracy and the need for the movement to collectively see off the threats to journalism – including political rhetoric, hostile public discourse and physical threats and intimidation taking place.

The NUJ's motions were among those passed unanimously in an extended session of the General Council – committing the TUC to supporting our News Recovery Plan and action to make the tech giants pay their way, after years of benefiting from editorial content without investing in it. We're also working with the International Federation of Journalists and sister affiliates to collectively create a global shift in the political will necessary to achieve this, through a digital services tax or levy that creates investment into frontline public interest journalism and news.

Our other important motion was on workers' rights – on the need to reform UK trade union legislation that allows union-busting and the exploitation of loopholes that facilitate companies thwarting efforts by workers to gain recognition and collective bargaining rights with the union of their choice. Our recent experiences with the British Association of Journalists (BAJ) and its secret deal with Iran International, to scupper the recognition application made by the NUJ on behalf of our 100-plus-strong chapel brought this into sharp relief. The process with the



Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) on our application continues, with ever more bizarre twists and turns – including the company providing evidence to the CAC of a second secret deal struck with BAJ, after it publicly withdrew from its recognition deal with immediate effect. More surreally, BAJ deny there is a deal in place. Meanwhile an entirely avoidable redundancy process was put in place, designed in our view, to target and remove two of our chapel reps. The need for real trade union recognition and a voice at work for NUJ members there could not be clearer.

Other key campaigns this autumn include building the strongest possible support for public service broadcasting, not least to see off the growing anti-BBC rhetoric. We will be launching a major new campaign to support freelancers and the self-employed, and the need for reform of employment rights and tax treatment. Branches will be vital in this work and our campaigns team will be in touch with toolkits and suggestions of how you can help lead these initiatives

In Solidarity,

**Michelle Stanistreet**

# CAMPAIGN

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

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## “Avalanche” of job losses

**M**embers at Bullivant have sent a message of thanks to all branches who contributed to their hardship fund while they took four days strike action.

The journalists working on the Midland's weeklies and websites took the action in response to the company's redundancy plans, new working practices, and after months of journalists being underpaid. Messages of solidarity flooded in for the NUJ members, including support from local MPs, councillors, and well-wishers who visited the socially-

distanced picket line.

Bullivant Media Limited placed adverts in its newspapers for journalists to take on strike-breaking shifts in what Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, called “a crass attempt by the company to undermine industrial action by its own workers”. Company boss Chris Bullivant Senior visited the picket line in his Bentley and distributed sandwiches, which were then donated to Acts of Kindness, the local food bank.

Bullivant Media Limited NUJ chapel said they had been buoyed by the countless gestures of support from readers, MPs, fellow journalists and trade unionists, councillors and all the activity on social media: “The public share our concerns about the damage to professional journalism.

They also expressed their outrage over working journalists paid close to the minimum wage not receiving their full salaries for months, and the redundancies.”

Talks with between the management and NUJ were ongoing as NUJBranch went to press.

The redundancies are just a number of the thousands the NUJ is dealing with across all sectors of the industry. The JPIMedia group chapel has called on its employer not

to make compulsory redundancies in the latest restructuring which will result in the loss of up to 30 editorial posts. The company, which owns The Scotsman, Yorkshire Post and Newsletter, also announced it was making a further attempt to sell the newspaper group. The Norwich-based Archant group, owner of the 150-year-old Eastern Daily Press, is also up for sale.

The NUJ is dealing with redundancies throughout the Reach group, at Newsquest, Tindle, on the Evening Standard, The Guardian and at the BBC. It is also fighting a handful of redundancies at Iran International designed, as far as the NUJ is concerned, to target two NUJ reps, which may lead to a tribunal claim for interim relief.

The Welsh Parliament's Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee warned that the regional media faced “an avalanche” of redundancies if the UK government's job retention scheme was ended in October. It called for the scheme to be extended and for the UK government to fill BBC Cymru Wales' £8.5 funding gap for the next two financial years.

The NUJ's Welsh Executive Council welcomed these proposals but said the report on the impact of Covid-19 on the Welsh media should have been bolder.

## Action

Link up with local NUJ workplace chapels and offer support

Lobby your MPs to call for an extension of the Covid job retention scheme

Brief your local MPs on the NUJ's News Recovery Plan and seek their backing:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/from-health-crisis-to-good-news/>

Matt Keyon



## End Assange's extradition

**T**he extradition of Julian Assange must be stopped as it is a clear attack on media freedom and journalists' rights, the NUJ has said. Branches should call on the government to intervene to dismiss the application by the US government. The Old Bailey hearings, to establish whether the Wikileaks founder should be sent to the United States to face 18 charges, most arising from the Espionage Act, are ongoing and expected to last several weeks. Assange faces a

sentence of up to 175 years in the US for publishing materials that document possible war crimes committed by the military. Michelle Stanistreet said: "If this extradition is allowed, it will send a clear signal that journalists and publishers are at risk whenever their work discomforts the United States

government. Media freedom the world over will take a significant backward step if Assange is forced to face these charges at the behest of a US president."

The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran has this month highlighted the targeting and harassment of London-based BBC Persian journalists in a report to the UN General Assembly. The BBC journalists - and those working for Iran International - and their families have been subject to intimidation, including death threats, from the Iranian authorities. Michelle said: "No one should have their life threatened because they are doing their job in the public interest."

Show solidarity with Belarusian journalists and support media freedom in Belarus by posting a branch solidarity message on social networks with the hashtag #BAJ25RAZAM.

## Branch action

Make media freedom a topic for your branch meeting and to discuss the issues raised by the Assange and BBC Persian cases.

Contact [campaigns@nuj.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@nuj.org.uk) if you need help with speakers.

Lobby your MPs to call for a stop to the extradition and to highlight the intimidation of colleagues under attack from the Iranian authorities.

# RECRUIT

## University Challenge

*The NUJ must find new ways to woo student journalists*

**A**s prospective media students prepare for their first term, some members are putting the finishing touches to their case for joining the union.

Many branches hold regular gigs with those starting journalism courses, spreading the word about the NUJ and persuading students to sign up. After all, it's a bargain at £30/€34.50 for the duration of their course.

Phil Sutcliffe, of London Freelance Branch, is a veteran, having spoken

at events at a range of colleges and universities in the capital. He said: "The depth of knowledge about trade unions varies but is mostly fairly shallow. 'Unions are about strikes'



is a typical response. We tell them that the whole point is to negotiate and prevent strikes – which are the union's weapon of last resort.

"We explain that being a NUJ member provides budding media and PR workers with a network of experienced professionals and opportunities, including training and events, career information and advice – and they will get the useful NUJ student press card.

"As freelancers we offer them advice on handling individual negotiations, getting the best fees and conditions and explain copyright; stuff that tends to be omitted from many courses."

Student members also have access to NUJ material on the union's website, such as information on work experience and internships, guidelines on reporting issues such as suicide, domestic violence or mental health, plus advice on protecting sources.

However, this autumn will be different. It will not be a matter of union recruiters turning up to freshers' week or arranging meetings at colleges, such as the City University event last year when Phil and colleagues from London Freelance Branch joined about 150 students; it will be about setting up Zoom (or other) virtual events to entice student journalists.

Volunteers should find a friendly journalism lecturer at their branch's nearest university or make contact with the journalism department and send copies of the NUJ's student recruitment leaflet. Suggest holding a meeting where branch members talk about the NUJ or a discussion on ethical journalism or creating a more diverse media industry.

Another way to make contact is via the National Union of Students. The NUJ and NUS have produced a student guide: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-and-nus-student-media-guide-2015/> Why not hold a joint NUS/NUJ Zoom meeting on why it's important to join a union and discuss issues such as equal pay? The NUS press office on 07866 695010 can help.

Seek out your local university student newspaper, magazine, radio station and on-campus TV studio. There may be an opportunity to give an interview, shoot some footage and be an on-air guest to answer students' questions.

### Student info

#### Website page:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/work/students/>

#### Recruitment leaflet:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-student-leaflet-2018/>

#### Work experience guidelines:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/exploiting-the-dream-your-guide-to-work-experience-and/>

#### Reporting guidelines:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-resources/nuj-guidelines/>

# SUPPORT

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## Providing a Covid lifeline



**N**UJ Extra, the union's welfare charity, has been a lifeline for members who watched their work fall off the end of a cliff as coronavirus arrived, with others becoming ill or shielding family and many in a complete panic about what to do.

It was not just financial assistance. Those surveyed by the charity last month said they had been emotionally fortified by the compassion and concern shown by union colleagues, officials, reps and the administrators and trustees of the charity. "My freelancing work completely dried up, but my bills still needed to be paid. I was

so grateful to the NUJ Extra fund as it allowed me to settle priority bills. Thank you so much for organising this," said one member surveyed.

Another said: "At a bleak time in my life and career as a journalist, I fell between the lines in terms of Covid support and my employer was cutting jobs and not offering even freelance work after my contract ended. Having moved to a different part of the country for the job I was no longer in, I was left at the beginning of lockdown as a sole parent with a small child unable to cover my living expenses. Thankfully, my NUJ rep mentioned NUJ Extra. I can only describe it as a lifeline I will never

forget and always be grateful for. I am now able to move forward and able to apply for new work."

A third said: "I cannot thank the trustees enough. When I am in a position to give back, I will, and I feel certain all NUJ members and others would do the same."

This work of the charity was supported by fund-raising efforts by NUJ branches, and as redundancies across all sectors are kicking in, the charity will need those donations to continue.

Chris Wheal, head of the charity's trustees, said: "NUJ Extra was overawed by donations from branches and individual members. Lay activists and volunteer reps have stepped up and worked tirelessly to put members in touch with us. Leyla, our administrator, has been outstanding and the feedback from the survey shows what a rock she has been to those in need. In my 33 years in the union I have never been prouder to be an NUJ member."

## Professional mentoring

**C**ould you do with a helping hand with your career? If so, the M Team can offer many years of experience and a listening ear. Mark Fisher, Jean Rafferty, Elaine Livingstone and Mike Higgins are trained mentors from the media world who can help in these Covid-19 days or, indeed, any time, offering a wealth of information, sympathetic and insightful support for people making their way in the creative industries. They offer packages for individuals and organisations. Through NUJ Scotland, there are a limited number of funded places available for members in Scotland and the scheme is open to all members and organisations outside Scotland. Go to the website for more information: <https://www.media-mentoring.org.uk/> or email [joanm@nuj.org.uk](mailto:joanm@nuj.org.uk)

**Donate at:** <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/433#!/> **Apply for aid:** <https://www.nuj.org.uk/work/nuj-extra/application-form/> **The charity's lawyers, Thompsons, provide a free debt support service to NUJ members, contact:** [extra@nuj.org.uk](mailto:extra@nuj.org.uk)

## Remote learning

*NUJ Training Scotland is now teaching members from Paris to Stornoway*



**M**elissa Silver is deputy editor of the Scottish Islands Explorer Magazine and, with her father, runs [www.welovestornoway.com](http://www.welovestornoway.com), the website covering the Isle of Lewis town and the rest of the Western Isles.

It is a beautiful if remote part of the UK; 290 km from Glasgow. So, the move to online courses, forced by Covid-19 on NUJ Scotland Training, has been a great boon to her.

Melissa felt she needed to boost her skills and confidence and the web course has proved invaluable to her job. She said: "I have completely changed my approach to writing headlines."

She was also impressed by the creative writing course: "I have tried others and was ready to be disappointed, but found the sessions very inspiring, with nuggets of good advice. Most of all the tutor didn't tell us what to do or think, just to be authentic. I have since written 10,000 words towards a book; it's been an energising and cathartic experience."

Joan Macdonald is project manager of NUJ Training Scotland which provides professional training from experienced tutors in the industry. The project receives money from

Scottish Union Learning and the Scottish government. Since the courses are now delivered online, they are open to NUJ members outside Scotland at a cost of £25.

She said the pandemic had kicked Scottish training into the digital future: "We'd talked about doing more online and then suddenly we had to. I was very impressed by how the tutors quickly adapted and created online packages. It's been good to open up the offering beyond Scotland - we have since had a learner from Paris. Of course, it has also been more convenient for many Scottish members. Whatever happens in the future, online learning will play an important part, and I was pleased to see good uptake of our free psychological first aid and tackling stress courses."

Catherine Deveney, who tutors the creative writing course, among others, and runs learning projects in the Highlands and Islands, has found Zoom a flexible, interactive and engaging teaching aid. She said: "You can do tutor-led sessions and have break-out sessions, plus the chat, whiteboard and post-it functions work well. I was worried about creating a learning atmosphere, but it doesn't take long before the faces on the screen soon get to know each other and collaborate. I have had lots of great feedback."

"Doing these courses, particularly the creative writing workshop, has been good for people's well-being and confidence and have really energised some of the students."

### Online courses

**Zoom training sessions:** fact checking; filming for i-devices; editing for i-movie; feature writing; becoming an effective freelance; Adobe photoshop introduction; the book route; podcasting; all you need to know to be a great news writer; libel in the UK; Wordpress introduction; the entrepreneurial freelance; advanced social media.

**Online interactive courses:** collaborative leadership; English for journalists; text handling (subbing) online; media awareness; digital health and safety.

**Free courses:** psychological first aid; tackling stress; local Scottish trade union history.

To book your place(s), provide your name and NUJ membership number to [scottishtraining@nuj.org.uk](mailto:scottishtraining@nuj.org.uk)

# TRAINING

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## Negotiators needed



*Caroline Holmes, head of the NUJ's reps' training programme, shows how reps' skills are great for the union...and for you*

**R**eps are the bedrock of the NUJ. That's particularly true at present with the Covid-19 crisis leading to many redundancies. Having well-trained reps is vital for a trade union. The NUJ's four-stage reps' programme is a mix of theory and practical ideas, which helps reps to feel confident when supporting and negotiating for members. Almost every issue has a health, safety, welfare and equality aspect, so these are embedded in the programme.

Reps' courses are held on the Zoom platform. They are available to reps in unrecognised as well as recognised workplaces. We expect the programme to remain online for the foreseeable future, with a review in Spring, 2021. Dates until the end of 2020 can be found at <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-trade-union-training/>. Our training is a great way for reps to come together, share their experiences and develop support networks. We are also running a new, three-stage programme to address health, safety and welfare issues related to Covid-19.

All the courses are free. If you are in a recognised workplace, you are entitled to paid time off to attend the training. Contact [tutrainin@nuj.org.uk](mailto:tutrainin@nuj.org.uk) for more details. Courses are due to be launched in the Republic of Ireland in the near future.

Further training sessions look at well-being, dealing with bullying, stress and harassment, how to present yourself with confidence online, equality, and dealing with redundancy. Bespoke training courses have been held for reps at the BBC, in the publishing industry and in unrecognised workplaces.

I recently ran two workshops for reps in an unrecognised chapel who are trying to get recognition from a hostile employer. We can be flexible to meet members' needs.

Having a branch or chapel union learning rep (ULR) is a way to respond practically to the learning and training needs of members; training is available for

ULRs. It can be tough supporting members who are in distress, particularly when so many people are dealing with anxiety and stress related to the pandemic. Knowing what support is available from the NUJ, and where to find information, is embedded into the reps' programme.

Being a rep is very rewarding. Many of the skills and knowledge you develop are transferable into your own personal and professional lives. Knowing how to get the best deal when negotiating is a skill everyone should learn!

## Info

### Reps' handy guide:

[www.nuj.org.uk/documents/your-handy-guide-to-nuj-reps-training/](http://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/your-handy-guide-to-nuj-reps-training/)

### Reps' webinars:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/reps-sessions-during-covid-19/>

### All training:

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

The bi-monthly NUJActive lists training news

# REASONS TO JOIN



## Press Freedom

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

**Are you keeping good company?**

Join the NUJ today at

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

**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
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