

# Informed

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

issue 36 DM 2021



## DM offers boost to union's future

**As Delegate Meeting voted by 82 per cent to increase the union's subscriptions, the NUJ's leaders heaved a sigh of relief.**

Chris Frost had moved an NEC motion changing the subs' structure, saying that without the increase the union would have to make huge cuts or merge with another union. There had been no union fee rise for the previous seven years and he said the NEC's proposals were designed to protect lower-paid NUJ members. (Details of the increase, page 6.)

DM2021 was a virtual conference, with all debates carried out on Zoom and a voting app which greatly speeded up the count and brooked no arguments. The pandemic had postponed the planned meeting in Southport last April, and with attendees living with ongoing and varying restrictions across Ireland, the UK and continental Europe, meeting virtually was a necessity.

The full final agenda from last year was added to with a raft of late-notice motions. Under Standing Order 3, less controversial proposals and motions reflecting work already being carried out by the union were adopted formally by delegates into the union's programme of work for the next two-year cycle.

It was a great success, with few technical glitches, 50 branches represented, 252 people present and 153 voting delegates determining union policy.

Praise was heaped on Sian Jones, the out-going president, for the calm and good-humoured way she chaired conference despite the new challenges it posed. At the closing stage, she passed on her baton to BBC journalist, Pierre Vicary, the new president. He will be aided by Natasha Hirst, voted in as vice-president (see page 8).

Delegates voted on pay campaigns, set up equality and reps' summits, put in

place climate emergency policies, anti-racism action, called for political lobbying and opted for a range of strategies and resources to give reps the tools to fight discrimination, challenge stressful workplaces and support freelance members.

Michelle Stanistreet, who started her third term as general secretary after being re-elected unopposed earlier in May, praised the collective efforts of dedicated staff, officials, chapel reps, branch officers and activists who had all, despite the Covid-19 crisis, delivered "extensive and unparalleled" industrial engagement and activity. "At a time when members have needed the NUJ more than ever, I am proud that our union has risen to that challenge," she said.

"Our collective work makes clear our industry deserves a union providing a voice to journalists and on journalism. For that we need an independent, campaigning union properly resourced, accessible and engaged officials, and the highest possible services provided to members."

By virtue of being virtual, it was possible to make DM events, training sessions and branch fringes open to all members. The 5PM Talk-ins, four debates with expert panels, discussed the NUJ's News Recovery Plan, international press freedom, threats to our right to know and the future of public service broadcasting (see page 10).

Another innovation was a video of tributes from friends and colleagues to the NUJ's new Members of Honour – Gary Younge, Aidan White and Mary Curtin. Conference also watched a moving film of recipients of the union's welfare charity, NUJ Extra.

There was also fun. Friday night was social night with comedian Mark Thomas and friends, plus our very own NUJ Gogglebox (see page 4).

**Also  
in this  
issue:**

Michelle's  
Message  
Page 2

Motions  
Round-up  
Page 7

Members  
of Honour  
Page 9

**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
OF  
JOURNALISTS

# Michelle's Message



**Our virtual DM went smoothly as delegates left Zoom with at least some of the usual post-conference feel-good vibe, and – finally – the sun has returned after what feels like months of cold and rain. The meteorological outlook isn't the only cause for budding optimism...**

**At the end of last week, the government's Statistical Bulletin revealed that overall UK trade union membership increased in 2020 by 118,000, with the proportion of the workforce in unions also on the up. This is the fourth year in a row that overall trade union membership has climbed. The NUJ's contribution to this total may be modest – but the 1,052 full-member uplift over the most recent six-monthly counting period is welcome news indeed and feels like quite a feat in an unprecedented year and ongoing industrial turmoil.**

The broader picture these figures reveal is one of a medium-term trend of rising membership, not simply a reaction to the Covid-19 crisis. It's a structural shift that we need to maximise and nurture, and encourage other workers to recognise that unions offer their best hope at protecting and promoting their interests.

These figures also signal future priorities. Trade union membership is higher among older workers and those who have been in the same job for a decade or longer. Reaching younger more mobile recruits, and those working precariously as freelancers and casuals, are critical if we are to secure our future for the long term and make the biggest impact on the lives of journalists and publishing workers.

The GMB's recent agreement to represent Uber drivers is a landmark in the unionisation of the gig economy. The improvements to drivers' working lives are long overdue. It's a victory that also robustly demonstrates trades unions' relevance to post-millennial enterprises and business models.

An organising renaissance is also evident in the NUJ. In recent months alone we have reached fresh recognition agreements at Springer Nature, Iran International, Alaraby, openDemocracy, Cagora, Reach and Newsquest LDR among others. It is the union's best run of organising success in new workplaces

for more than two decades, with more to come given the many other organising initiatives in full swing.

*“A revived NUJ and a resurgent trade union movement is our chance to navigate inevitable changes ahead”*

It was fantastic to see delegates from many new chapels at our Delegate Meeting – even if Zoom couldn't provide the socialising opportunities of our usual seaside get togethers. It may have been a virtual meeting, but the decisions and resolutions made by delegates will inform the union's strategic priorities and work over the next two years, and also provide a decisive turning point in the NUJ's fortunes.

Before DM, we had endured over a year of pandemic-related restrictions and two dramatic unknowns. The first was whether it would be possible to bring together more than 200 delegates and observers online. If we could, would such a meeting be sufficiently robust in organisation that critical, contested votes could be held by means that were beyond reproach. No less important was whether such a meeting would take the difficult decision to raise subscriptions to a level that gave the NUJ a fighting chance of survival?

That we achieved both was testimony to the extraordinary work of both NUJ staff and our national executive, and the collegiate spirit of our delegates attending from across Ireland, the UK and continental Europe.

The emphatic decision to increase subs – approved by 82 per cent of votes – is particularly important and makes it easier to explain to our membership. No-one welcomes rises in subscriptions or fees but achieving such a huge

majority demonstrates that few who looked seriously at the union's financial position were left in any doubt that it was necessary. More importantly, it was a conference where the vital need for an independent vibrant NUJ was made clear - the countless achievements and victories secured by the union for its members is proof indeed.

As DM closed, it was heartening to receive countless texts and notes of appreciation - with unanimity about the brilliant job done by our out-going president Sian Jones in steering us through a unique conference with skill, humour and empathy.

This edition of Informed outlines many of the important decisions delegates made in two days of sessions that covered scores of motions and issues. It's testament to all present that the vast majority of debates were conducted with co-operative comradeliness and the certain knowledge that that far more unites than divides us.

This matters because of the kind of union we are. Back in 1906, when the contingent of journalists from Manchester threw in its lot with a like-minded group from Leeds, they wanted a union that was democratic. Distrustful of those not rooted in newsroom realities, they wished into being a collective where important decisions were in the hands of members and whose leadership would always have to demonstrate its responsiveness to journalists' needs. That's the spirit which has run through our union ever since.

For all their foresightedness, what those pioneers could not anticipate was the exercise and preservation of union democracy from our kitchens, bedrooms and conservatories. The triumph of our two days of adopting reports and debating motions was that it was true to our forebears' vision, even if the vagaries of 'unmuting' would have perplexed those trailblazing activists even more than they did us all last week.

How soon pandemic fears will be completely behind remains unclear.

## Sian Jones' adieu

**I've had quite an unusual tenure as president. When I stood for election for vice-president I was on maternity leave and I had concerns about how much of a juggle that would be. Little did I know what was in store in the next few years, with my career taking me to work in Westminster, out again, and then the coronavirus pandemic. I should have handed the baton over more than a year ago, but coronavirus had other plans and we have all had to adapt greatly in the past 14 months.**

I'm so proud of the work the NUJ does every day for our members - and the NUJ has stepped up during the pandemic to give truly outstanding representation to journalists and media workers across the UK, Ireland and beyond.

Our News Recovery Plan became the blueprint for our work - campaigning, negotiating and lobbying for rights and protections for media workers. Michelle has probably sat in more meetings with government ministers in the past year than any general secretary over our entire history!

As I sign off as president, I wish the incoming president, Pierre Vicary, the very best. Pierre is a brilliant comrade



who will be excellent. And I'm delighted that our incoming vice-president is Natasha Hirst, someone who shows such brilliant leadership, strength and empathy. It's nice to know it won't be too long before there are two women in the top jobs again.

I'd like to thank my parents and my partner, Tony, who have given me so much support over the past five years. And to Callum and Ellyn - mummy should be on the computer a little less now. But most of all I thank - and blame - Michelle Stanistreet, our general secretary, for encouraging and supporting me. Michelle inspires, motivates and lifts this union and I'm truly thankful to have worked alongside her in the limited role I have been able to play.

But for all that we have lost during the pandemic - and for many, the cost has been terrible - we have learned some valuable lessons.

Even if in the future we only hold a few of our meetings via video conferencing, it will deliver significant savings - financial, environmental and in time. This past year has propelled important digital engagement and inclusion. Some meetings can be significantly more inclusive and immediately responsive to industrial issues if they are held

over digital platforms. We've learnt on the job the upsides and downsides of remote working. The NUJ will need to be responsive to these different needs and use all opportunities to further widen our activist base in the months ahead.

A revived NUJ and a resurgent trade union movement is our chance to navigate inevitable changes ahead with workers' needs as a central priority, not an afterthought. For the first time in a while we have the chance to make our own weather.

# DM Update

## Fruit of the Zoom

**Tim Dawson put the virtual DM to the test and found digital innovation worked well**

**The portents were ominous. It was Thursday afternoon and a score of delegates logged on for a “technology familiarisation session”. Could video conferencing possibly deliver a rumbustious delegate meeting of more than 200 journalists?**

From the apparently swirling darkness of Walthamstow, the top of the head of London Freelance veteran, Jenny Vaughan, loomed on screen. “This is worse than my wildest nightmares,” she cried, in a wail that might have been the disapproving ghost of Delegate Meetings past. With scarcely 10 per cent of the anticipated participants online, and Zoom sceptics ascendant, our conference seemed fatally glitched.

As the handful of staff and Standing Order Committee members departed Headland House that evening, a menacing black cloud hung over King’s Cross. NUJ democracy had survived Hitler, the High Courts and Rupert Murdoch, but now, it seemed, insufficient bandwidth would lay us low.

But it all went relatively smoothly. Michelle Stanistreet opened the gathering, after some technical motions had been voted in to allow the proceedings. Hers was an upbeat account of the union’s recent work and coming prospects – provided the subs’ vote went the right way.

Without the mental parentheses of long rail journeys or flights, joining a delegate meeting from newsroom, kitchen or bedroom was an unfamiliar jolt. But as Friday morning wore on, and attention fixed on the issues at hand, an unanticipated miracle seemingly overcame us. For all the frustrations of down-the-line democracy, it felt less and less like a technological aberration and increasingly like an NUJ

delegate meeting. But could a Zoom gathering ever match the emotional intensity of a seaside hall brimful with disputatious trades unionists on the cusp of a big vote? Amazingly, as delegates found their feet and the order papers lumbered towards the vote on subscriptions, it began to seem as though it might.

The executive previewed the big vote all day, weaving into every contribution the need to raise revenues. When the debate finally came, it was impossible not to feel awe that all over Britain and Ireland, not to mention many European capitals, we were connected with each other in the serious-minded consideration of our union’s future.

The scale of the affirmative vote – 82 per cent in favour – was as large as has ever been achieved for such a motion. Who knows whether we will ever again want or need another online DM? The

conduct of that debate, however, and the scale of approval, provided definitive proof that NUJ democracy thrives, whether delivered at a seaside gathering or over fibre-optic cable.

Undoubtedly the star of the show was the digital voting app, which banished card-vote arguments and put the president in the position of a referee with VAR – no room for dispute and much quicker.

Like any Zoom meeting, our get-together was rich in unintended revelation. We met industrial firebrands who surround themselves with floral chintz. There were kitchens that looked more like police safe houses than homesteads and our assistant general secretary demonstrated how combining bald head, green screen and headphones creates the illusion of a halo. Doubtless he would claim this as confirmation that trades unionists are always on the side of the angels.

It was all held miraculously together by president, Sian Jones, projecting the sunny, unflappable charm of a children’s TV host. By her side (socially distanced of course), was the standing orders committee’s John Lister, with his silvery



curls and steel-rimmed spectacles, exuding the authority of a weekend news anchor. The pair could have graced any breakfast news sofa as order papers were despatched and points of order dealt with.

So it continued for two days, mediating discord between the Black Members' Council and the Socialist Workers' Party, recommitting us to fighting for higher wages for media workers, and finding common ground in our attitude to the heart-breaking developments in Palestine.

At DM's close, the Q&A system was nearly overwhelmed with congratulatory messages. The president deservedly won particularly fulsome praise, but there was a tide of satisfaction with the entire meeting.

Who knows what the future holds? My take-away from two days wired to my screen was this: when the NUJ comes together with good spirit and determination, there is no limit to what we can achieve, however novel the challenges or daunting the prospects.

## Beyond the fridge

**Providing light relief was the Friday night social with comedian Mark Thomas... and the NUJ's very-own Gogglebox stars.**

Should anything be off-limits for a confessional stand up? Listening to Mark Thomas' Zoom gig, it was hard not to wonder. So luridly did he paint his mother that a call to social services would be in order were he not a middle-aged man who voluntarily spent lockdown at the maternal hearth. Duo Jonny and the Baptists sang, joshed, goofed and harmonised their way through plans to make black pudding from the Queen's blood, mocking the Abrahamic myth, and commissioning the murder of huntsmen - it was a gleeful confection of nonsense, enlivened through palpable delight in each other's company.

The real novelty of this charity fundraiser, however, was - the NUJ does Gogglebox. The audience of activists



appeared periodically on a gallery screen beamed from viewers' living rooms. A pair of Easter Island statues stood sentinel, craggy features not cracking despite the comedians' best efforts. One suit-and-tied gay blade took in proceedings before a roaring fire, another disported himself in a red vest, while an émigré activist clearly keeps on his trilby, even while at home. All provided an insight into the rich human tapestry that makes up our union. On the evidence of this outing, however, it would be unwise to rely on a commission from Channel Four to save the union's finances.

AA Film Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

## Ode to Joy... and Bruce

**While people's dogs, cats and children have all popped up during important Zoom meetings, tutor Dan Mason had to deal with a hormonal canary called Joy.**

As part of DM Week, preceding conference, were a series of free lunchtime taster courses. Dan, who usually plies his trade for NUJ Training Wales, was welcoming in members for his social media campaign kickstarter class when Joy, actually a male, piped up, full-throated and chirruping

his best in search of a mate. Fortunately, Barbara, his owner, muted him. Dan's other classes, Podcasting taster and Fast and free digital tools for journalists, were thankfully minus amorous avians.

NUJ Training Scotland's David McKay led a news writing session, stressing it was a craft not an art, where facts are king and simplicity is all. He went through the who, what, when, where, why and how rules of creating a news story and told the class to avoid clichés - and adjectives - like the plague. When he asked what was wrong with a headline about



gymslip mums one of the class asked: "What's a gymslip?" Exactly.

James Doherty offered a taster of his popular scriptwriting course. He explained the excitement of working for the Liverpool based Brookside soap, with its ground-breaking lesbian kiss and bodies under the patio. James donned

(metaphorically) his Die Hard vest as he took the class through the mechanics of the words and action in the Bruce Willis action film franchise script.

"More than 30 people signed up and if it gives just one a spark that might bring their script to screen, then it's more than worth it," said James. "I urge others to invest in this very talented man," said one satisfied pupil. Book now for Scottish training at: <https://nujtrainingscotland.com/zoom-tutor-led-courses/> and NUJ Training Wales <https://www.nujtrainingwales.org/>

# Round-up

## Conference decisions

### *Delegates vote for subs' rise*

**The most crucial vote of the conference - which many believed would decide the future of the National Union of Journalists - was a national executive motion on changes to the subscriptions rate.**

"Your vote will decide whether the NUJ remains as an independent union or if we will be swallowed into a huge general union and no longer be the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. That's how important your vote on Motion 25 will be," John Barsby, NUJ honorary treasurer, told delegates.

He said the last subs' increase had been seven years ago, with delegates at the DM in Southport three years' ago voting against a 5 per cent rise. At the end of the 2012 financial year, the union had employed 42 members of staff, now the number was 34. "But the level of work is not reducing," he said, adding that if the union was to continue to pay for its pension fund, provide quality members' services and punch above its weight in lobbying and campaigning for journalists and journalism, subs must rise.

Joyce McMillian, from the Edinburgh freelance branch, said: "We need an independent union and independent voice that speaks up for journalists and journalism for now and in the future."

The motion was carried by 82 per cent of delegates. The motion also called for a vigorous recruitment campaign and an effort to boost awareness of the union's 1 per cent rule, which acts as safety net for low earners.

The new subscription rates from July 2021 will be:

Grade 1: £16 or €19 per month  
Grade 2: £20 or €25 per month  
Grade 3: £28 or €34 per month  
Members earning less than £14,500 (£16,000) per annum will pay £12 (£12.60) a month.

A further increase in subscription rates

in July 2022 will be introduced:

Grade 1: £17 or €20 per month  
Grade 2: £21 or €26 per month  
Grade 3: £29 or €35 per month  
Members earning less than £16,000 (£17,500) per annum will pay £13 (£13.80) a month.

A motion proposed by London Magazine branch introduced a new graduate members' rate for student members who may now retain membership after qualifying, for two years, and a new joiners' rate, lasting two years, set at 50 per cent of the current grade rate.

### *Effects of Covid-19*

**Conference discussed a range of motions relating to the effect of Covid-19 on members, the way they work and how the NUJ should respond.**

The problems of home working, the blurring of work time and home time and people being forced to continue to work from home were all concerns. David Gallagher, BBC London branch, won agreement from DM for the union to lobby to enshrine in law a right to disconnect so members can turn off their technological devices after work without facing consequences for not replying to emails, phone calls or text messages. The notion has already been adopted in a code of practice by the Republic of Ireland and passed into law in Slovenia.

A survey carried out in the publishing industry found that while working from home has proved convenient for some, for others the experience has been highly unsatisfactory and stressful. Those affected negatively were women, young people and the poor. Eleanor Connor, Oxford & District branch, said: "We must ensure the NUJ uses all its tools, including health and safety law and equality grounds, to ensure that

employers do meaningful impact assessments and consult with the union before imposing working conditions on members."

A motion from the Disabled Members' Council (DMC) raised the issue of Long Covid, with its symptoms ranging from fatigue, depression and brain fog to joint pain. Ann Galpin, DMC member, said employers were notorious for not supporting workers with chronic conditions. The DMC will raise awareness of Long Covid and produce guidance for reps on how to support freelancers and employees with the condition, and the union will back proposals to get it recognised as an occupational disease.

The union agreed to support any NUJ member placed at risk by an employer's "no jab, no job" policy and join the TUC and other unions in campaigning against employers who make having a vaccination mandatory.

Conference acknowledged the challenges faced by newsgatherers during the pandemic, particularly those working in public-order situations which resulted in increased incidents of abuse from protestors, the public and, on occasion, interference from the police.

### *Other debates*

**The finance motions may have been seen as the most important to the union, but delegates speaking to the climate emergency motion had the future of the planet in mind.**

Gareth Simkins, an environmental policy writer, said journalists had responsibility for the way the climate emergency was reported and unions should monitor employers' behaviour in promoting carbon neutral policies. Conference supported a range of ways it could promote the **green agenda** [<https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/dm2021-climate-emergency.html>].

The union will intensify its **pay campaign** to ensure all media workers get a pay rise. A survey of Newsquest members showed most existed on less than £22,000 - a senior journalist's wage

– and apprentices were paid as little as £7,500 a year. The union will also work with MPs to outlaw Newsquest's practice of firing and rehiring.

Women with problems during **menopause** will now have extra help; the union agreed to launch a menopause-awareness campaign and training for reps to support maternity and breastfeeding rights. A one-day **equality seminar** to "equip members with the knowledge and tools to identify and challenge discrimination" will be held this year. The Photographers' Council and Black Members' Council (BMC) will survey photographers and videographers to calculate the demographics of the industry.

Conference welcomed the NUJ's role as a member of the UK government's **National Committee for the Safety of Journalists**, the plan to protect journalists from attacks and harassment and its decision to push tech platforms to take action against the perpetrators of online abuse. Members are encouraged to participate in the forthcoming UK government's call for evidence on attacks on journalists. Another motion noted the increased intimidation of journalists in Northern Ireland and conference instructed the NUJ to continue to help journalists facing dangerous working conditions.

The Newspapers and Agencies Industrial Council will organise another of its successful **reps' summits** in spring 2021 to review the state of the industry, encourage the exchange of best practice and boost the confidence of reps. An event bringing together **health & safety and welfare reps** will also be held.

A motion to merge the union's four **equality councils** was not carried. Natasha Hirst, NEC, pointed to their excellent work, the training they provided and how the NUJ was represented at the TUC's equality conferences; she said a merger would send out the wrong message.

The union has voted to lobby against the **Police, Crime, Sentencing and**

**Courts Bill** which attempts to limit the right to protest, and also to ensure the Online Safety Bill does not damage media freedoms.

The Health and Safety Committee, Equality Council, Disabled Members' Council and Photographers' Council are to organise a round table event on **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.

A motion to call the union simply **NUJ** was defeated, with delegates voting for research into a possible name change or branding to reflect the diversity of members' media roles and a report back to the next DM.

The union will work to change media workplace culture which creates unsustainable workloads, excessive hours and high levels of stress. A survey of members will be conducted to assess the extent that these factors are affecting **members' mental health**.

The union agreed to defend quality **public servicing broadcasting** in the UK and Ireland; demand the over-75s TV licences are funded by the British government; and resist political interference in the BBC. It will fight for better funding and wages at RTÉ, the Irish broadcaster, and a fair settlement for S4C in Wales.

A review of the effects of **Brexit** on members' working lives will be undertaken within the year and the union was tasked with monitoring developments on pensions for British nationals based in EU countries.

Conference applauded the role played by the NUJ in securing justice for presenter **Naga Munchetty**, who was censured by BBC management for calling out Trump's racism on air. A BMC motion noted the row caused by Ian Murray, former executive director of the Society of Editors, who denied bigotry in the media and said the **Sewell Report's** findings amounted to "wilful ignorance"; conference agreed to continue to fight racism.

The union will work in Parliament to make changes to **Freedom of Information** laws to extend the UK

Information Commissioner's fining powers for bodies which refuse to comply with its requests, and to extend the scope of legislation to include companies providing outsourced services to public authorities. It will also lobby for an urgent review of Scotland's FOI legislation.

The detention of WikiLeaks founder and whistle-blower, **Julian Assange**, was condemned by conference, which said his case constituted a grave threat to free speech and a free press; the union agreed to continue to campaign on the issue.

## International

**With "press freedom under attack from all sides" the NEC's Cailin Mackenzie said last December's IFJ White Paper on Global Journalism had lifted the veil on the worrying global trend of declining media freedom, and attacks and cuts to journalism.**

Conference heard that attacks were no longer confined to the usual suspects notorious for jailing journalists – Turkey, Egypt, China, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Belarus – reporters and photographers covering protests against coronavirus restrictions were physically attacked by extremist groups in Germany, Italy and in France where "the global security bill" would restrict the publication of photos and video footage of the police at demonstrations.

Donald Trump lashed out at journalists who asked him critical questions and his negative tweets created a toxic environment against the media in the US.

DM instructed the NUJ to back the IFJ in standing up for press freedom and journalists' rights, to join the campaign for the release of the more than 250 journalists jailed for their work and to lobby for binding instruments to protect journalists, such as the IFJ International Convention on the Safety and Independence of Journalists. An NEC motion condemned in the strongest possible terms the deliberate targeting of journalists and media offices by Israeli forces during their attacks on Palestine.

# People

## Pierre Vicary takes over as NUJ president



Tim Dawson

**DM 2021 heralded the changing of the guard with Sian Jones receiving a huge thanks for her role as president as she passed the baton on Pierre Vicary.**

Pierre who has worked for the BBC World Service since 1995 – now as a freelance – said he intended to champion self-employed journalists, night workers and, as a former war correspondent, would maintain his interest in journalists' safety.

Although born in England, he lived in

various parts of Europe and started his career with the Australian Broadcasting Company as a correspondent in London. He went on to set up the broadcaster's Central and Eastern bureau in Zagreb where he was at the heart of the action, witnessing the fall of the Berlin Wall, the downfall of Nicolae Ceauşescu's dictatorship and the wars in the Balkans. He has been a long-term chair of the Broadcasting Industrial Council and a member of NEC for 10 years.

He said: "An in-person DM is always the best, but there were technical innovations – such as the voting – that should be continued. Putting together an agenda that allowed DM more time to take decisions and debate the visionary motions and where we needed to take a new position was also successful. "And we must look towards securing a long-term way of deciding our finances. I'm a working journalist but hope to be able to take up invitations from as many branches as I can."



Nick McGowan-Lowe

**Natasha Hirst was elected as Pierre's vice-president. She is a freelance photographer based in Cardiff specialising in political and campaigns photography.**

She worked as equality officer for the Wales TUC, as a political researcher and constituency photographer for the First Minister of Wales and is chair of Disability Arts Cymru. "It's an honour to have the opportunity to continue campaigning on issues close to my heart: protecting and promoting journalism, journalists' rights and being a strong advocate for increasing diversity across our industry," she said.

**John Barsby** was re-elected honorary general treasurer. Members of the union's councils, committees and boards were voted in for the next cycle.

## Lyra McKee remembered

**A special event during DM Week to celebrate the life of Lyra McKee brought together her partner, Sara Canning, friends, colleagues and all who loved the young journalist.**

Lyra was shot by a Republican dissident during rioting in the streets of Derry on 18 April, 2019, aged 29; the union pledged to support the Justice for Lyra campaign and appealed for witnesses of her murder to come forward.

Sara said: "There was never a dull moment with her."

Séamus Dooley said Lyra was an outstanding journalist and her short life should not be defined by the circumstances of her death. She was named Sky's journalist of the year at the age of 16 and her *Letter to my 14-year-old self*, in which she described the challenges of growing up gay in Belfast, won wide acclaim. The year before she was killed, she had

secured two book deals and had received an offer from Netflix.

Also on the Zoom event was Mark McCauley, director of photography on the forthcoming film, *Ceasefire Baby*, about Lyra. He said he was proud to be associated with the film which includes lots of tender moments between Lyra and her friends, now captured forever.

Owen Reidy, the assistant general secretary of the Irish



Congress of Trade Unions, said democracies needed investigative journalists such as Lyra.

# Video tributes paid to Members of Honour

**The union's latest Members of Honour – Gary Younge, Aidan White and Mary Curtin – were announced to Delegate Meeting via video.**

The three received tributes for their union activism, high-quality journalism and as ambassadors of the NUJ nationally and internationally.

NUJ president, Sian Jones, introduced Gary Younge, award-winning journalist, author, broadcaster and academic. Alan Rusbridger, his former editor at The Guardian, called him an “all-round journalist and brilliant thinker”; Guardian columnist Simon Hattenstone described him as a “fiery, inspirational and motivational” co-FoC of the newspaper’s chapel; Saadeya Shamsuddin, of BBC London News, said in real life he was as charming, funny and thought-provoking as his writing and “paved the way for other journalists of colour”; Jim Boumelha, NEC member, recalled him giving the first Claudia Jones lecture and his untiring work for the George Viner Memorial Foundation, which provides bursaries for black and minority ethnic journalism students.

In 1996, Gary won the Laurence Stern Fellowship and was sent to work at the Washington Post for three months. After several years of reporting from all over Europe, Africa, the US and the Caribbean, he was appointed The Guardian’s US correspondent in 2003, writing first from New York and then Chicago and has since written five books, including *Another Day in the Death of America, A Chronicle of Ten Short Lives*; he is now a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester.

Next up was Aidan White, NUJ activist now better known for his international work and founder member of the Ethical Journalism Network. His former colleague Kate Holman described him launching a

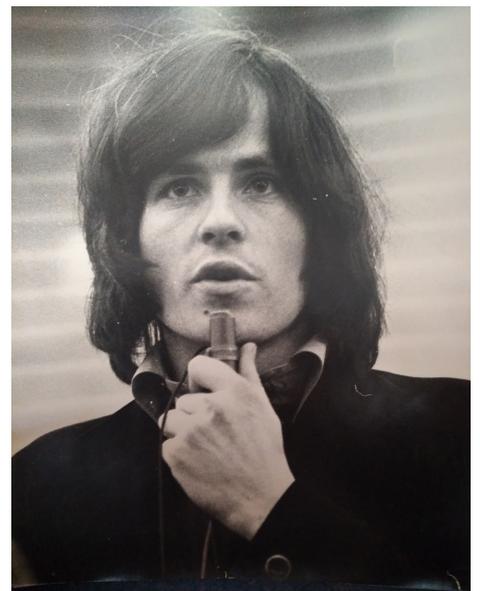
pioneering newspaper in London’s East End in 1979 and he’s back there now with a new publication, Newham Voices. John Bailey, a former NUJ president, evoked the heady days when Aidan helped lead brazier-lit NUJ provincial newspaper strikes and whose youth, vigour, and looks prompted his description as the Donny Osmond of the left. Ronan Brady, Dublin Press and PR branch, described his role in making the International Federation of Journalists the global voice of journalism and Chris Elliott, former director of the Ethical Journalism Network, said Aidan knew that to be a good journalist, you had to have ethics.

Aidan used the IFJ as a platform for global solidarity among journalists, launching campaigns to fight for journalists’ rights, safety, fair working conditions, equality and professional standards, placing journalism at the centre of democratisation agendas around the world.

The third NUJ Member of Honour was Mary Curtin, a distinguished broadcaster with RTÉ who led the joint unions’ group. Séamus Dooley, NUJ assistant general secretary, talked of her commitment to social justice, integrity and modesty. Eimear Ní Chonaola, news anchor on Nuacht TG4, said attention to detail, diligence and her “famous notebooks” made her an effective negotiator with management. Dónall O’Braonáin, former Dublin broadcasting branch chair, said she had a depth of understanding of members’ issues.

On retiring from RTÉ, Mary trained as a mediator and is a volunteer with Community Law and Mediation and involved with the restorative justice campaign group, Facing Forward.

**You can view the video at: [www.nuj.org.uk/resource/tributes-paid-to-members-of-honour.html](http://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/tributes-paid-to-members-of-honour.html)**



The union's latest Members of Honour. From top; Gary Younge, Aidan White and Mary Curtin.

# Talk-ins

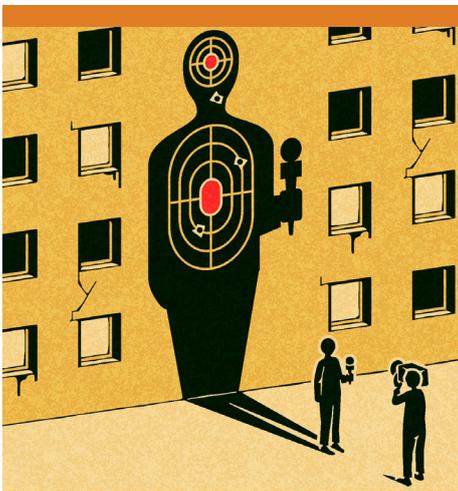
## DM Week debates

### *Journalism under attack*

**It was a truly chilling moment when Nasser Abu Bakr faced his Zoom audience and described how he was inhaling gas fired by the Israeli army.**

The president of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate was in Gaza, where bombs were raining down on the strip of land between Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. That morning, one of his colleagues, radio journalist Yousef Abu Hussein, was killed when his house was hit by a missile.

Nasser was speaking at the 5PM Talk-in, with journalists and union leaders from around the globe, chaired by



Jeremy Dear, deputy general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) who said: "The killings of journalists happen not just in war-torn countries but are delivered and systematically designed to silence independent voices and investigative journalism all around the world.

"With more than 230 journalists in jail, laws on sedition and criminal defamation are used to silence media, and unlawful surveillance and online harassment target journalists. As we see today in Gaza, journalists and media

organisations are deliberately targeted by those who want to hide the truth."

Among the panel members was Ayşe Düzkan, "adopted" by the NUJ after being sentenced to 18 months in jail by the Turkish authorities for writing for the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem*. She described new laws which banned people recording violence by the police and soldiers against demonstrators.

Journalists were also being intimidated and arrested under the increasingly authoritarian regime of Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party said panel member, Sabina Inderjit, general secretary of the Indian Journalists Union: "In Kashmir there has been a complete communication clampdown, with the internet blocked for over a year. That was the darkest time I have ever gone through."

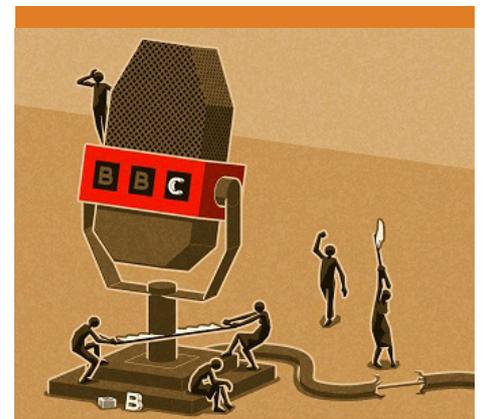
The IFJ uses its annual end-of-year Killing List to highlight every media worker's death. On Wednesday 19 May, the 2021 tally was 14 – to be updated. The panel's Jim Boumelha, IFJ treasurer, said: "About two journalists are killed every week. They are mostly local, beat reporters, not the more glamorous war correspondents. In nearly nine in 10 cases, no prosecutions will follow."

### *Defending public service broadcasting*

**While the public service broadcasters came into their own during the pandemic, competition for eyeballs from the likes of Netflix and Disney+, under-funding and hostile political forces all remained threats, a panel chaired by Radio 4's Rebecca Keating heard.**

However, the DM Week 5PM panellists were easily able to be upbeat about the worth of public service broadcasting (PSB) channels and why they were so important, so trusted and so full of talent. Cearbhall Ó Siocháin, an RTÉ

Irish language broadcaster, said: "At the outset of the pandemic audiences came back to RTÉ in search of reliable news and current affairs. And then we saw spikes of people returning to us for comfort and succour; to escape the horror in the arts, music, drama and entertainment. The real test is that we



can convince them that the reasons they came during Covid-19 are the reasons they should stay."

Patrick Barwise, co-author of *The War Against the BBC*, believes the former chancellor, George Osborne, who persuaded the BBC to take on the costs of the welfare benefit of the over-75s' TV licence, is the main villain. "If the BBC's public funding had simply kept pace with general inflation, then today it would be annually almost £1.4 billion better off," he said. Jo Stevens, Labour's media and digital shadow secretary, was more concerned by the government's shadowy PSB advisory panel which does not publish its agenda, or discussions. She also believes it could be only pure ideology driving any privatisation of Channel 4: "What is the problem the government is trying to solve by doing this?"

Sir Peter Bazalgette, chair of ITV, is worried by the tech giants: "If in 10 years' time all TV signals are distributed by the internet, that means the gatekeepers will be the Googles, the Facebooks, the Amazons." That's why new laws to grant prominence to PSBs

and fair value for their programming were needed. He was also worried about Boris Johnson's latest wheeze to end junk food advertising before 9pm – revenue, in ITV's case, which equals the money it spends on regional news. All of them agreed the days of the TV licence were numbered – it was a case of finding a stable source of revenue, perhaps a household levy, that could not be raided by the government.

## News Recovery Plan

**“We all accept that the arts cannot exist without state subsidy”, Joyce McMillan, NUJ Edinburgh Freelance branch chair, told the NUJ's SPM Talk-in, “and now we need a paradigm shift to accept government funding is equally needed for public service journalism.”**

The NUJ's News Recovery Plan was launched a year ago in response to the crisis caused by the pandemic and to provide a blueprint to realign the media with public interest journalism at its heart. It was lobbying by Joyce and her Edinburgh-based colleagues that led to the establishment of a Scottish government-led working party to explore elements of the plan. Nick Powell, of the Welsh Executive Council, has also advised the Welsh government on measures to support local news.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said when Covid-19 struck journalists were put on furlough and lost their jobs. Freelancers' work dried up and many did not receive a penny from the UK government's Covid-19 aid packages. The Recovery Plan proposed a series of measures and interventions to see off the threat of the pandemic and then revitalise the industry – key levers included a levy on the tech giants to inject cash into public interest journalism and a Journalism Foundation to assess how to allocate funding and foster innovation.

Siobhan Holliman, who sits on Ireland's Future of Media Commission, said its wide-ranging remit was reviewing



the role of journalism and democracy; the rise of misinformation; diversity, equality and inclusivity; and how Irish culture, sport and talent is represented.

Andy Grimm, of the American journalists' union, NewsGuild, said since the 2008/9 recession, half of newspapers jobs had gone, but private equity investors reckoned there was still money to be made on their way down, with Alden Global Capital buying out ailing titles and shedding most staff.

## The right to know

**“A journalist at all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed,” says the NUJ's code of conduct. But a range of forces are making this “right to know” precept more difficult, according to the panel of investigative journalists chaired by Sian Jones.**

Jenna Corderoy, of the media organisation openDemocracy, said the Freedom of Information Act had been undermined – particularly by a Cabinet Office “clearing house” which has blocked and vetted FOI requests to government departments.

Guardian reporter, Rob Evans, said FOIs are useful, but patience is needed. It took him 10 years to get access to the so-called spider letters, written by Prince Charles to ministers, expressing his views on farming, genetic modification,

global warming and architecture. Rob and colleague, Paul Lewis, have also been at the centre of investigations into the undercover police operation which infiltrated lawful protest groups and unions, known as SpyCops. Rob's advice is to always treat a whistle-blower well.

Lizzie Dearden, home affairs and security correspondent at The Independent, described how she came under personal attack when investigating the far right in the UK, from notorious far-right activist, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (Tommy Robinson), who was later issued with a stalking protection, and Yellow Vest protestor, James Goddard, given a restraining order and fined after calling Lizzie “vile scum of the earth”.

City University's Paul Lashmar said it felt investigative journalistic endeavours were going backwards after the Guardian's office was raided following the Snowden revelations. More prosaically, it is the lack of time and resources which often restrict investigative journalism, according to Aasma Day, former North of England correspondent for HuffPost and the Johnston Press investigations



unit. It can take time to build up trust before sources will speak to a reporter, particularly those from marginalised communities.

**You can read the full Talk-in reports and view the video at: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/learn/resources/resource-library-search.html?topic=talk-in>**

# Broadcasting

## BBC plunged into Panorama drama



### After the Bashir debacle, Ian Burrell reassesses the legacy of former BBC director general Tony Hall

**When he stood down from the organisation last August, it was a relatively graceful departure. Not for him the fireball exit of his 54-day predecessor, George Entwistle, nor the politically-enforced resignations of previous BBC leaders such as Greg Dyke and Alasdair Milne.**

In a valedictory interview, Amol Rajan, then BBC media editor and now a Today presenter, concluded that Lord Hall had been “an effective DG”, working in the “toughest” circumstances.

That record must be reappraised following Lord Dyson’s withering indictment of Lord Hall’s “woefully ineffective” handling in 1996 of the lies and fakery perpetrated by reporter Martin Bashir to gain his era-defining interview with Princess Diana.

Tony Hall’s failings have contributed to “one of the worst crises in the history

BBC

of the BBC”, says Paul Siegert, NUJ broadcasting organiser. “It’s a self-inflicted mess and I think it tarnishes Tony Hall’s legacy forever.”

As head of news, Tony Hall deemed Bashir an “honest and honourable man”, despite clear evidence of forgery, and in 2016, when he had been promoted to director general, Bashir was re-hired as the BBC’s religious affairs correspondent.

“At that time Blind Freddie and his dog knew what had happened in 1996 and it’s absolutely outrageous that he was brought back on staff,” says Pierre Vicary, president of the NUJ and father of the chapel in the BBC World Service newsroom.

Facing criticism from the future king – Prince William effectively accused the BBC of playing a role in his parents’ divorce and some part in the events that led towards his mother’s death – and a dismayed public, the BBC is having to review its editorial practices and investigate just how Bashir was brought back. Lord Hall, who quit his post-BBC job as chairman of the National Gallery because of this scandal, could face questioning from MPs.

With hindsight, just how bad a director general was he?

The task of running the national broadcaster has changed. No one has matched the 11-year tenure of Lord Reith, who invented the job in 1921. For 10 of the first 12 DGs the role came with a knighthood but the last to receive such an honour was John Birt in 2000.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead already had a peerage when he arrived in 2013, just before the organisation was to reel from the Jimmy Savile scandal which broke a year later. “Tony Hall had a lot of goodwill from his time as head of news so people were quite pleased when he was appointed,” recalled Paul Siegert. The charismatic former Royal Opera House chief was “approachable” and staff felt

he was “in our corner” in a way that Mark Thompson, a previous incumbent, was not.

Yet, when it came to negotiating with government, notably over liability for licence fees for the over-75s, Lord Hall failed to show Thompson’s resolve. “Thompson told government that if they wanted him to do it, they would have to find a new DG, whereas Hall took a far weaker position,” says Pierre Vicary. “Many of us felt he was not strong enough.”

Paul Siegert credits Hall for a lot of good work in addressing gender-based pay inequality, noting that hundreds of NUJ female members had got pay increases. But he didn’t deal particularly well with legal challenges over fair pay brought by BBC presenters Carrie Gracie and Samira Ahmed. He oversaw changes to iPlayer that made it more relevant but hasn’t solved the problem of bringing young audiences back to the BBC, Siegert says.

Pierre Vicary believes culpability for the “catastrophic” Bashir affair also rests with other senior BBC managers who brought the disgraced reporter back into the fold. “It’s admirable that Tony Hall has taken the consequences and resigned from his current job, but what many BBC journalists are outraged about is that none of the current senior management has shown the slightest inclination to follow suit.”

While he is unhappy that Tony Hall embodied a BBC management culture which “appears to be in complete fear of whoever is in power”, Vicary believes his regime was less disastrous than that of an inveterate cost-cutter who took the knife to the organisation at a time when it faced less external competition. “Birt was, in my opinion, the worst DG we ever had because he ran the place like an accounting office, and journalism doesn’t work like that,” he says. “If we had a pantheon of the dreadful, he would be top of my list.”