

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Informed

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NUJ fights for members' rights

It was the first time in two years that members of the NEC and officials came together in person for a meeting at Headland House, the NUJ's London headquarters.

It was a busy agenda and with the deadline for Delegate Meeting (DM) motions in sight, the members spent some time making sure that a range of subjects was put forward for debate, from defending journalists from legislative threats, protection of sources, safety of journalists, providing support to journalists in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Palestine and Hong Kong, plus a subscription increase.

DM, the union's policy making body, will meet on 28 and 29 April 2023 at TUC Congress House, central London, and will incorporate a number of innovations created during the previous online meeting, including electronic voting. Tim Dawson explains on page seven why delegates will not need to pack their buckets and spades this time.

It was also the first opportunity for the NEC to discuss the company-wide strike at Reach, which involved a huge logistical operation across the UK and Ireland and a tough battle against a chief executive who while, royally rewarding himself, was not prepared to go beyond a 3 per cent rise to his hard-working staff. Many of the NEC's members had joined their local picket line (see page four); and they praised all those involved in the action. Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, said the strike had boosted recruitment, including among many younger journalists working in the digital operations.

The general secretary briefed the NEC on the union's recent safety work. The union had just launched a **range of videos**

where members explain the threats, abuse and intimidation they experience as part of the job - the videos are to raise awareness of the issue and put across a strong message that journalists should not have to put up with it.

A mobile, mini-app **safety toolkit** was also launched which allows members to look up advice on the go on their phones, including how to secure communications, prevent cyberattacks, prepare to cover demonstrations, on the laws covering journalists' rights, mental health and workplace safety.

the National Security Bill." The motion said: "The NEC agrees to provide maximum support for members and to make our protests known to parliament and the police forces." As we went to press the union's stand was vindicated by the outcome of an independent review. (See page eight).

Raj Ford, NEC Midlands member and BBC rep, brought the cuts in local radio to the attention of the NEC. She said 800 of her colleagues in local radio had been put at risk of redundancy. The union had mounted a mass Twitter offensive on



The NEC passed a motion condemning the arrests of journalists covering the Stop Oil protests by Hertfordshire police. Natasha Hirst, NUJ vice-president and photographers' council chair, said: "The arrests of journalists capturing material at last week's protests are wholly unacceptable. These developments are particularly worrying in light of government's efforts to criminalise legitimate journalistic activities through

local radio's 55th birthday to publicise the plight of the service, which will now share programming across the network from 2pm. The NEC passed a motion condemning the plans, urging Tim Davie, director general, to have a rethink and to support BBC members if they decided to take industrial action. Contingency to ballot was granted at Unison and STV if industrial action was required.

**Also
in this
issue:**

Reach
battle
Page 04

Radio
SOS
Page 06

Unfriending
Facebook
Page 10

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

Séamus Says



It was in-person business as usual when the National Executive Council returned to Headland House for its November meeting, with finance and preparations for our Delegate Meeting 2022 dominating a comprehensive agenda

There was only time for brief post Zoom and Teams pleasantries as members renewed real-life acquaintances amid an almost back to school atmosphere even though DM 2023 was already looming into view.

Inflation, the energy crisis, failed economic policies and the long-term economic consequences of Brexit did not exactly dampen spirits but the message from Michelle Stainstreet as general secretary could not have been clearer as she spoke to a motion proposed by Finance Council chair Chris Frost and seconded by NUJ president Pierre Vicary.

The decision of the 2021 delegate meeting to increase subscription rates has enabled the union to weather the storm over the past two years in a time of major challenges across all sectors. We have continued to operate without a deficit and to fight for members and their families but, in the face of massive increases in the cost of living, to successfully defend journalists and journalism the NEC must table a motion seeking a modest increase in subs for 2023.

As well as attempting to keep abreast of increased costs of bills and inflation, we need to keep up the repair of our buildings, including replacing the windows in Headlands House, the NUJ's London headquarters. We are also set to lose rent income as tenants are moving out owing to the building work next door.

As always when it comes to increases in subscription there was a lively discussion, with understandable concern for the plight of lower paid members, but the motion, which was adopted, and will now appear on the preliminary agenda currently being circulated to branches, strongly emphasised the need for a subs structure which takes into account the less well off, often those who need services most frequently.

That's why all grade one members and most of grade two members (82 per cent of all paying members) are now

eligible to claim 1 per cent subs.

As Chris Frost reminded the meeting, only a small number of grade 2 members, all earning more than £25,000 pa, would be obliged to pay an increase in subs with as many as 2,500 grade 3 members also entitled to claim 1 per cent subscriptions.

Against that backdrop the NEC agreed to a motion which would amend the rules to give effect to an increase in all grades of subs in July 2023 and again in July 2024 by approximately 5 per cent per year.

"It's worth reflecting on the success achieved over the past two years and the resources devoted to defending members individually and collectively, industrially and legally."

All NEC members and full-time officials are conscious of the financial demands on members. As branches consider the proposed subs increases, it's worth reflecting on the success achieved over the past two years and the resources devoted to defending members individually and collectively, industrially and legally. Our campaigning work, our work in supporting sister unions in places like Afghanistan and Ukraine, our dominant role in shaping media police in the UK and Ireland have been enabled by the degree of financial certainty arising from the subs increase in 2021.

Had we not secured that subs increase the NUJ would not in all probability have survived. Financial instability is no basis for a fighting union.

Many unions - the majority in the UK and Ireland, do not require a conference decision to increase subscriptions.

The NUJ has always taken pride in our democratic structures and in Congress House, next year delegates will have an opportunity to vote to ensure our ability to continue our vital work as an independent, sustainable union.

Throughout the globe unions are struggling to survive – and are fighting back: 2022 may well go down as the year of three Prime Ministers in the UK but history will also record that in this year workers took a strong stand against the worst excesses of market capitalism.

The strike at Reach Plc delivered meaningful increases for many lower-paid workers, but its wider significance was the clear message it sent about the ability of the NUJ to organise and to fight. It's by no means the end of the story at Reach Plc and we are not resting on our laurels.

As Christmas approaches our thoughts turn to those for whom 2022 has been a year of misery and destruction.

Across the globe journalists continue to operate in appalling conditions. Our union has been supportive of the work of the International Federation of Journalists in Afghanistan, in Yemen and of course Ukraine.

Amid all the gloom I received a text on 21 November from Serhiy Shturkhetskyy, general secretary of the Ukraine Union of Journalists and associate professor of the department of journalism and mass communications at Ostroh Academy. It was a reminder of why trade unions are important.

“These days, Ukraine is plunged into darkness. Due to the attacks of Russian missiles, electricity is supplied unstable and not all the time. This complicates the work of journalists, teachers and other people.

“Now we are preparing power banks, batteries, various generators and means of autonomous communication. We're also collecting warm things – sleeping bags, thermal underwear etc, for journalists who express a need for it.

“Winter is coming. But all the same, the Light will defeat the Darkness.”

REASONS TO JOIN

Be Part of a Collective Voice

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

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at nuj.org.uk/join

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You can donate to help Ukraine journalists via **the IFJ's safety fund**.

The UK may be out of the EU, but the proposed European Media Freedom Act is extremely relevant to members in the Republic of Ireland and Continental Europe. It puts journalistic freedom,

editorial control and ownership on the EU political agenda. We are working to improve the weak provisions regarding source protection and concentration of ownership.

Light and love to all this Christmas from all at the NUJ

Update

Tough pay talks pay off

Reach strike sets headline as chapels yield results

“BREAKING: our pay negotiations have concluded with a deal!”

This tweet from Verso Books Union UK added that the chapel had won an average 10 per cent rise, with 12 per cent for the lowest-paid members and a sliding scale to 6.5 per cent for the highest. The deal was to be backdated to 1 January and runs to the end of 2023.

“Now negotiations move on to the other items in our recognition agreement – working hours, holiday, sick pay, compassionate leave and parental leave. We’re submitting our proposals to management this week, watch this space,” said the fledgling chapel at the publishing house which won recognition in mid-July.

Negotiating pay deals this year has been tricky. With inflation soaring and many members having taken pay cuts during the pandemic, getting an increase to keep up with the cost of living is important. Meanwhile, employers point to the increases in energy bills, cost of print and the dire state of the economy as reasons to remain stingy. This is why it has never been more important to have the NUJ, with the ultimate threat of industrial action, on members’ sides.

Iran International won a 5 per cent increase, its first since launching five years, and members at the Common Wealth think tank won a 10.75 per cent increase and a 1 per cent top-up on employer’s pension contributions – both the results of the NUJ achieving union recognition.

The main pay story this year, however, was at Reach, where members for the first time held company-wide industrial action in a bitter struggle over pay with an intransigent CEO, Jim Mullen, whose

own remuneration had been boosted by more than £4m. The NEC praised the reps, the officials, administrative staff, and just about everyone

in the NUJ’s office who updated the membership lists, put together campaign materials, ensured the action was legal and, most of all, kept the reps informed and together in solidarity.

There was a 79 per cent vote for strike action and more than 300 joined or re-joined the union, some at the eleventh hour so they could join a picket line at almost all of the company’s 14 sites,



Picket lines and gatherings took place across the UK and Ireland



including Canary Wharf, on 31 August. Morale was high, messages of support flooded in from all over the globe and more than 150 took part in an online rally. Reps ratcheted up the pressure by agreeing to a three-day strike.

This brought the Reach negotiators back to table with a new offer, which was narrowly agreed by the members. It was a complicated deal. The increases, to be paid via new minimum salaries in 2022, ranged from 14 per cent to 44 per cent benefiting around 750 journalists, particularly those who were lowest paid. Others will receive a 3 per cent increase or minimum £750, and the possibility of a payment from company profits. Staff will also receive two unconsolidated £200 payments. A new career progression structure was proposed, as was the appointment of the MoC at Cardiff, Abbie Wightwick, as a union secondee to work on it. A survey of the pay at Reach's national titles is underway as part of that work. The deal included NUJ recognition in Northern Ireland and the Republic and an agreement by Reach

to review and discuss freelance rates.

Michelle Stanistreet added her praise for all those who worked on the action and told the NEC that it had resulted in a widening of the membership's demographic since new recruits tended to be younger, more diverse and generally on lower pay, a good sign for the future organisation at the newspaper group. She said greater transparency in pay and career progression structures should pay dividends later for the wider membership at Reach.

At PA, staff received a 6 per cent across-the-board increase and a one-off payment of £350 for those earning under £30,000. The award followed a letter organised and sent to the company signed by 150 members of staff. An active chapel committee has plans for its next steps.

A survey of journalists' pay in Ireland was published at a roundtable meeting at a Future of the Media event held in Dublin last month. About 55 per cent of the 350 members who took part earned less than €40,000 (£35,000) although, surprisingly, 42 per cent got a

pay increase this year, or in 2021. Credit for the increases was given to efforts by the NUJ although the survey also showed that many journalists who were promoted, or took on extra work, were not recompensed.

In Scotland there was good news at Newsquest, for once, where good relations with the managing director there resulted in a pay deal of 4 per cent for those earning less than £25,000 and those on £25,000 to £35,000 receiving a 3 per cent increase.

Pay surveys are being carried out by the union at National World and in the magazine sector. A joint campaign with Oxford & District branch, Book branch and the Black Members' Council will examine diversity in publishing, focusing on entry-level pay rates as a major barrier to recruiting beyond white, middle-class demographics.

Meanwhile, the freelance office and Freelance Industrial Council are working on a campaign to improve freelance rates and for chapels to include freelance rates during pay negotiations.

Assange update

Tim Dawson sent a report to the NEC on Julian Assange, who has spent the past three-and-a-half years in Belmarsh prison as the US application for his extradition is considered by the British courts and government. His extradition has been approved by the Home Secretary, however some lines of appeal may still be open. The US successfully appealed against the case being made that the move would affect his mental health. Members of the NUJ took part in a human chain surrounding the Palace of Westminster and continues

to lobby for his release, as his case has serious implications for all journalists.

Mary Maher bursary

The Irish Times' inaugural bursary in memory of the NUJ's pioneering Member of Honour was awarded to Dublin City University student Katie Mellett. The Irish Times will pay her fees and contribute to accommodation costs for her journalism course. She will have a placement during college holidays and on successful completion of the course will be offered a fixed-term contract by the Irish Times group. A senior

Irish Times journalist will act as a mentor for the duration of her studies.

Courts report

The NUJ welcomed a report by the cross-party Justice Committee calling for a single digital portal where the media and public can access full information on court proceedings, court documents and any other relevant information. It said every court should have a publicised point of contact to provide information and answer queries. It welcomed the broadcasting of sentencing, but said the reporting on family court

proceedings was "no longer fit for purpose and should be reviewed and reformed".

Orwell prize

The Orwell Society/NUJ Young Journalist Awards 2023 is open. Entrants are asked to write an arts review or political column and explain how it has been informed by Orwell's influence. This year's judges include Gary Younge, former Guardian journalist now professor of sociology at Manchester University, and broadcaster Marverine Cole and investigative journalist, Tam Hussein. Please encourage a young member **to apply.**

Update

From local hero to zero

The BBC plans major cuts to local radio with most output to be shared across the network from 2pm

One of the most memorable episodes of Liz Truss's short premiership was being skewered by the journalists from local radio.

It was her first media outing since the "mini-budget" four days previously had unleashed the fury of the market, criticism from the IMF, and knocked lots of £££s off the UK's economy. Perhaps her advisers thought she would get an easier ride than from the media big beasts Andrew Neil or Beth Rigby. It wasn't so.

Radio stations covering Leeds, Norfolk, Kent, Lancashire, Nottingham, Teesside, Bristol, and Stoke-on-Trent were given about five minutes each to interview the then Prime Minister. The reporters, familiar in their town or county, suddenly became famous UK-wide as Truss was left reeling from questions on how she should respond to people who needed food banks, her policy on fracking, crab



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deaths in the North Sea, on the King's Lynn hospital in her constituency where the roof was falling in, her "reverse Robin Hood" tax plans to benefit the rich, child poverty, whether she was crashing the economy, and Rima Ahmed, of BBC Radio Leeds, who asked "Where have you been?"

Jason Horton, BBC England director, said he was proud of them. "It is imperative that we reflect the voices of local people in the communities we broadcast from, hold those in power to

account and that's something we did this morning, something we do every day," he said.

But they won't be doing that any more in the afternoons or evenings - all of them have been told their jobs are at risk under plans to cut local radio's budget to fund an expanded digital service.

The NUJ launched its campaign #KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal in response - 5.7m still listen and love their local stations at the heart of the communities they serve. Labour Party leader, Sir Kier Starmer, in an interview on Radio Humberside said he was a fan of BBC local radio and was worried about the cuts. Award-winning BBC broadcaster, Fi Glover, said on Radio 4's The Media Show that the cuts were bonkers.

The union believes digital expansion can be done in other ways and notes that local radio already produces digital content. MPs on the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee are calling in BBC executives on 1 December to quiz them about their plans. Go to the #KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal campaign page to see how else you can get involved and write to your MP.

In other TV news ...

The NUJ condemned the **Iranian government** for its increased threats to journalists at **BBC Persian** and **Iran International** for reporting the protests sweeping across the country following the death of Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the "morality police". Two British-Iranian journalists working for the UK-based Persian-language TV channel have been warned of a possible risk to their lives, and in Iran journalists were

arrested for covering the protests and Mahsa Amini's funeral. Michelle Stanistreet said the union would "continue to do it all it could to support our members and, along with the International Federation of Journalists, press internationally and via the UN to force Iran to desist".

Pay deals: Members at **Iran International** voted in favour of accepting a 5 per cent pay increase (or £2,500) from January 2023. This is the first time since it was launched five years ago that staff have had a rise, the result of the NUJ achieving

union recognition by the company.

Following the threat of industrial action at **Al Jazeera**, some of which would have disrupted coverage of the World Cup, and interventions by the International Federation of Journalists and the International Trade Union Confederation, the Qatari owners of the broadcaster have reconsidered their pay deal and offered a two-year deal of 4.5 per cent. "We look forward to working more collaboratively in the future with Al Jazeera management," said NUJ

national broadcasting organiser, Paul Siegert.

MPs briefed: BBC reps met MPs and peers in Parliament to discuss the 400 jobs cuts at the **World Service**, including BBC Persian Radio where journalists targeted by the Iranian authorities could lose their jobs. They were also briefed about the plans for local radio and on the BBC News Channel which is set to be replaced by a channel covering domestic and international stories.

There will be a World Service debate in the House of Lords on Thursday 1 December.

Update

Delegate Meeting

NEC member Tim Dawson sets the scene for the next Delegate Meeting, in London

The NUJ's Delegate Meeting (DM) returns to London next spring. It's the first time in three decades that our most important gathering will be held in the city where the greatest concentration of our members live. The "in-person" conference will be at Congress House, the TUC's headquarters, and the heart of British trade unionism.

The departure from traditional seaside haunts is necessitated by the economic chaos engulfing the wider economy. Most conference venues and hotels are unwilling to commit to prices even a few months in advance for fear of being caught out by inflation. Union staff recommended a London DM as the surest way to control costs.

As envisaged, the meeting, that brings together around 250 activists, will cost around £120,000 (down from an all-time high of around £250,000 more than a decade ago), safeguarding significant funds for industrial work.

Nor will location be the only novelty. Lessons learned from 2021's online DM will allow the event to be rationalised



Voting will now be counted electronically

with the use of electronic voting, and the aspiration to adopt some uncontested motions as a formality. This will allow the event to be held over two days, rather than two and a half. As well as keeping down costs, the reduced time commitment will open the event to more participants. Sector conferences, for example, will remain online, facilitating involvement from a far larger activist community. The use of video for items

such as the celebration of members of honour and the work of NUJ Extra are also likely to be retained from 2021's meeting. Wraparound online events are also planned to maximise member involvement.

For those attending in person it will be the first DM gathering for five years. Among the subjects to be covered by the policy-making body are the National Security Bill that threatens to criminalise journalism in the UK, Slapps, the use of aggressive litigation to silence journalists and writers, the threats to journalists in Ukraine and Afghanistan, and the next steps to increase pay for all journalists at Reach.

The National Executive will also seek a five-per-cent hike in subscriptions. "No one wants to raise subs. With inflation in double figures, however, a modest increase is required to meet rising costs," Chris Frost, chair of the Finance Council told NEC.

DM also provides a forum for the NUJ's branches to consider the NEC's work over the preceding period. Our campaigns to save BBC local radio, to promote the safety of journalists, and oppose police harassment of journalists will all be under the spotlight. More than anything, though, it will be an opportunity to catch up, share experiences, and recover our crusading zeal. Whether online or in person, do join us if you can.

Corgi Cymru

The union's Welsh Executive Council called for an urgent review into Newsquest's funding for Corgi, a Welsh-language news service which closed after five months. It was awarded £100,000 by the Books Council of Wales, which also halved current affairs magazine Golwg's £200,000 grant. The council also raised concerns

after Newsquest closed its news website The National, 18 months after it was launched.

David Nicholson, NEC member for Wales, said: "The National's closure makes the job of the Welsh Government's public interest news working party even more urgent to come up with solutions to the issues facing Welsh news."

Gary Younge

Gary Younge, the journalist and author, gave this year's Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture, organised by the union's Black Members' Council. The title was Who Let The Dogs Out? What racism tells us about news values and what the news doesn't tell us about Black people. The event was recorded and can be

viewed on **the NUJ website.**

NUJ recognised

Three further workplaces have won union recognition. The London Bureau of the news agency Agence France-Presse, award-winning media publication gal-dem and publishing house Verso will now be able to negotiate pay and conditions with their companies.

Parliament

Turmoil and trouble

After the high drama of Boris Johnson's departure, the tortuous Tory leadership battle and the huge turmoil of the Truss regime, Parliament appears to be settling down, albeit with Rishi Sunak and his Chancellor Jeremy Hunt grappling with a deep recession and soaring inflation.

Nadine Dorries has gone, to be replaced by Michelle Donelan (pictured), who survived the latest ministerial musical chairs as the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Newspaper reports suggest she is to drop the privatisation of Channel 4, while a media bill, due to include guaranteed prominence of public service broadcasters on TV guides, is awaited. Meanwhile the Online Safety Bill has stalled.

But other legislation, injurious to civil liberties and journalists' rights are proceeding. The union is working with various organisations and its cross-party Parliamentary Group to raise awareness of the dangers they pose. The National Security Bill would criminalise journalists' activities and have a chilling



effect on photographers by making it an offence to be "in the vicinity of a prohibited place". The SNP's Stuart McDonald cited Faslane, the naval base home to nuclear weapons, as a possible example.

John McDonnell, secretary of the Parliamentary Group, said the bill would "strip away longstanding safeguards to prevent the wrongful access of journalistic material and are a risk to sources and investigative journalism more widely". He said the government's decision to limit scrutiny of the bill to two hours was "a matter of contempt". This meant an amendment with cross-party support by Kevan Jones (Labour, North Durham) to introduce a public interest defence for journalists and

whistleblowers was not heard. The bill was voted through and goes to the Lords where Jones predicted it "will be shredded".

MPs reacted angrily to the BBC's announcement that local radio content is to be shared on a regional basis outside of core morning hours. Emma Hardy, MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle, raised the issue in the House of Commons where MPs of all hues said BBC local radio was "a lifeline for news and education, mitigating against rural isolation and supporting people's rural mental health", a "great incubator for new talent" and "one of the crown jewels of our public sector broadcaster". Karl Turner (Labour, Kingston upon Hull East) tabled an early day motion (EDM) condemning the proposed cuts, supported by the Parliamentary Group. Media minister Julia Lopez promised to raise concerns with BBC director-general Tim Davie, although failed to acknowledge the impact of the licence fee freeze on BBC budgets.

The Parliamentary Group tabled an EDM on 400 job cuts at the World Service. Seven Asian-language services will become digital-only, and BBC Arabic radio and BBC Persian radio will close to make savings of £28.5m.

Police arrests "wrong"

An independent review into the conduct of members of the Hertfordshire constabulary has found that they acted inappropriately in arresting journalists covering last month's Just Stop Oil protests.

The strong stand taken by the NUJ has been vindicated by a recommendation that Hertfordshire Constabulary should consider ensuring that all officers engaged with public order activity complete the union's comprehensive training.

The review, carried out by Cambridgeshire constabulary was

requested by Hertfordshire chief constable Charlie Hall following the intervention of the NUJ amid public anger over the arrest of journalists Tom Bowles, Rich Felgate and Charlotte Lynch.

Hall accepted the recommendations and apologised to the journalists for the way they were treated.

Welcoming the report Séamus Dooley, assistant general secretary said: "This is a vindication of the firm public stand taken by the general secretary, strongly supported by the NEC. The recommendation is

also an endorsement of our steady work at national level in training and developing greater awareness among police of the importance of the press card. The clear and unambiguous acceptance of the key recommendations regarding the role of the NUJ is especially welcome.

"We need a consistent approach by all police so that journalists are not restricted on the whim of individual constabularies. This is a positive outcome, but it does not take away from the fact that these journalists should not have been treated in this fashion."

Full details of the review

Update

Thanks a million ...

Or should that be more than three million, the sum paid out in settlements and recovered fees for NUJ members?

More than £1.6m has paid out to members in compensation in the past quarter and a further £1.5m for a range of employment matters including unfair dismissal and discrimination.

Grateful members have praised officials and the legal department for their invaluable support, assistance and guidance. One said: "With patience, compassion and expertise, the NUJ was there for me through a workplace grievance followed by a redundancy situation – the most stressful time of my working life. The legal advice I received was outstanding, with the NUJ's legal team demonstrating a thorough and robust approach that is second to none. Thank you."

Another said: "My union official could likely diffuse an international hostage situation with his mild-mannered demeanour. The advice I received was spot on, timely and very professional. The professionalism, the attention to

detail and the swift turnaround in dealing with my matter would put Roadrunner to shame. Engaging, informative and patient are just three attributes that I'd associate with the NUJ's legal team."

The union often punches above its weight. "The NUJ provided me with legal support when I was taking on an American private equity company in the courts. I could not help thinking of David

and Goliath when the courts backed my hefty claim," said a member.

The freelance office assisted a member with a court claim for payment owed for design work, resulting in the full payment of £2,500.

Thompsons Solicitors provides legal assistance for personal injury cases. After a serious car accident Amy Sutton said she was offered a fair, swift service: "Thompsons was always easily contactable, via email or phone, throughout my case. I'm happy with the result of my claim."

Paul Erlam is also grateful for help with a claim for a road accident. He said: "It is good to know and very reassuring that support from the NUJ is there when you need it."

Members have access to legal services, not just on workplace issues, and including their family.

Go to **the NUJ website** to find out more about legal assistance.



Books up

With employees at HarperCollins in the US taking strike action, demanding better pay and benefits, there are signs that NUJ membership is growing in the book sector here, particularly at Bloomsbury and Penguin – and also at Pan Macmillan where the union has started to organise. Reps from Bloomsbury told The Bookseller: "We have found that the chapel has created a proper sense of belonging and companionship across the company for colleagues genuinely striving to improve

our working lives and to ensure that our voices are heard in decisions which affect us all." A Bookseller survey found that 37 per cent of those in publishing said their salary was not enough cover the cost of living. Anna Hervé, NEC books rep, said following the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, young people had been galvanised and were attending branch meetings. Penguin Random House's acquisition of Simon & Schuster will now not go ahead, as the world's biggest book publisher decided

against appealing against a ruling by a US federal judge blocking the deal on the grounds it would damage competition.

World Cup advice

The NUJ urged journalists covering the World Cup to follow a seven-point safety plan issued by the International Federation of Journalists. There have been reports of camera teams and journalists being stopped from filming in public places by security staff. The Qatari government has ruled governmental

buildings, universities, private properties, and places of worship out of bounds for filming. Reporters should expect to come under surveillance and monitoring of their moves and could be vulnerable to spyware. All foreigners visiting Qatar are required to download two mobile applications, the official World Cup app Hayya and Covid-tracking app Ehteraz, operated by the Ministry of Public Health with the aim of "monitoring covid spread". Reporters should be aware that these are very intrusive apps.

Spotlight

Matt Kenyon



Out of the Wild West

Why no longer being a friend of Facebook could benefit news: Ian Burrell on Silicon Valley's retrenchment

At the beginning of November, Nick Clegg, president of global affairs at Meta, gave an interview to *Fortune* magazine in which he defended his boss Mark Zuckerberg's vision and slated the press for its "lazy headline caricature of the health of our existing businesses".

Less than a week after the former Liberal Democrat leader's insistence that "our core business is doing very well indeed", Meta announced 11,000 redundancies, the biggest round of layoffs

the tech sector has ever seen. The cuts affect all departments at the tech giant, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Meta has overreached by pouring money into its exploration of the metaverse, a future world accessed via virtual and augmented reality headsets.

The deep cuts suggest that, after more than a decade of exponential growth, the times of plenty are over in Silicon Valley. They coincided with Elon Musk's takeover at Twitter and his immediate culling of 4,000 staff. Amazon followed with a programme of 10,000 job losses.

For years, UK and Irish media have complained that big tech threatens their very existence by hogging online advertising revenue. Yet there has also been hope that the "duopoly" of Google and Facebook might use their vast wealth to be benefactors of news. So, is this retrenchment by Silicon Valley good or bad for the fortunes of news publishers on

this side of the Atlantic?

We should be careful not to overstate the significance of the cuts. Amazon's mass layoffs account for less than 1 per cent of its total workforce. Meta's sweeping job losses follow the hiring of 15,000 people early this year and restore company headcount to what it was in February.

Yet the cuts show a stalling in confidence across the tech landscape with consequences for news media. Douglas McCabe, CEO of Enders Analysis, detects a changing relationship between publishers and big tech that will squeeze the news industry's income but offer new opportunities to take advertising share.

Facebook is turning its back on news, he says. During the summer, before these cuts, the social platform put down a "very important milestone" on its long and difficult journey with journalism. Campbell Brown, Facebook's VP Global News Partnerships since 2017, was abruptly re-titled as VP, Media Partnerships. Enders issued a note to its clients, warning: "Facebook is manoeuvring away from the news sector, including the financial support that it provides."

Soon afterwards, Facebook told its news "partners" that it would no longer pay them for content on its news tab, which Brown had overseen. It meant an end to handouts worth around \$200m (£168m) to a range of 50 publishers including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post as Facebook told them it was focusing on "more creative initiatives".

McCabe believes that UK and Irish publishers should now give up on imagining Facebook as a financial prop. "Facebook was signalling that it was retreating from supporting the news industry. That is one of the big turning points and means that the news industry globally is going to have to rely on Google because Facebook is not there to support it."

He argues that Google, which pays

licence fees to hundreds of publishers, including 120 in the UK, through its Google News Showcase scheme, remains “genuinely committed” to news.

Silicon Valley’s job cuts can be an opportunity for news publishers in building ad share. With the likelihood that a leanly-staffed Twitter will go increasingly unmoderated and Facebook indicating that its strategic priority is the metaverse, brands may be more attracted to putting their spend with good quality news sites, especially when the phasing out of cookies makes primary data more valuable. “I genuinely think there is an opportunity for news publishers to differentiate themselves from what I call the Wild West of the internet,” says McCabe.

Yet the outlook remains tough. Musk tweeted that “the economic picture ahead is dire”. The pandemic lift in online advertising, linked to growth in e-commerce, has faltered. During the 2008 recession, digital advertising was new and robust but now, as a mature sector, it cannot escape the cost-of-living crisis.

Publishers that depend heavily on this income are most vulnerable. After five years of profit since going digital-only, The Independent confirmed in November that 52 roles – around one-fifth of its staff – were at risk of redundancy after an advertising decline caused by “extraordinary economic headwinds”. A tally by Press Gazette has recorded 860 redundancies in the UK, US and Ireland news media during 2022 with 384 editorial hires, a net loss of nearly 500.

Staff at Reach, the UK’s largest news publisher, were invited to apply for redundancy in the summer, just as the company experienced the first strike in its history with journalists walking out over a pay dispute. Further strikes were averted by a settlement. “There were significant increases for many members. We gave Reach a fright and forced it to rethink how it deals with employees,” said one Reach journalist.

But group editor-in-chief Lloyd

Embley and chief digital publisher David Higgerson emailed all staff referencing “increasingly challenging” market conditions and announcing that “as part of a programme to make cost savings across Reach, we’re going to be running a voluntary redundancy programme”.

The magazine sector has also been hit by the downturn. Immediate Media, publisher of the Radio Times, announced in October that it was placing more than 50 roles at risk. “Immediate were seeing huge inflationary pressures particularly in print, with less consumer demand for products and slower growth in digital,” says Pamela Morton, NUJ senior organiser responsible for magazines.

Immediate, which sells 74m magazines a year, performed well during the pandemic and has signed up more than 1m readers to subscriptions. But executive chairman Tom Bureau told staff that “in the last few months we have been seeing a steep decline”. At the

same time it closed youth title Top of the Pops which it had been publishing under licence from the BBC.

Yet other big magazine publishing groups have so far resisted cuts. And there is hope that many news brands will be more resilient to the downturn following concerted efforts – exemplified by The Guardian, Financial Times and Telegraph – to increase reader revenue and become less reliant on the whims of advertising.

When it comes to withstanding these economic storms, McCabe advocates the strategy of moving away from ad-focused clickbait and super-serving readers with quality news content. He points to the success of DC Thomson in recruiting 30,000 subscribers to its Dundee Courier and Aberdeen Press & Journal titles while avoiding the print circulation declines seen elsewhere in the UK. “There is something working there,” he says. “Something quite powerful.”

Tanks off the Reach lawn

National World’s David Montgomery has confirmed he is pulling out of a bid to take over rival newspaper group Reach.

It was more than 23 years after being ejected as chief executive of Mirror Group, the irrepressible Montgomery made his audacious move, telling the stock market he was “at the early stages of exploring a possible offer for the entire issued and to be issued share capital of Reach”, with its portfolio of 130 brands, including the Mirror and Express. The 74-year-old saw an opportunity to advance with Reach’s share price having fallen by 60 per cent over the past year.

In January 2021, National World acquired beleaguered local publisher JPI Media for just £10.2m, bringing famous titles including The Scotsman

and The Yorkshire Post into its stable. With National World’s market capitalisation only £50m, compared to Reach’s £350m, the bid always seemed unlikely. “He’d love to do it,” says Douglas McCabe, CEO of Enders Analysis. “But it is hard to see how the boards and shareholders of both companies could land on a number they are all comfortable with.” And so it came to pass, yet, when announcing the climb-down, the company said “this is despite National World having received in principle financial support from within the investment community to fund a potential deal”. When he was last in charge of the Mirror Montgomery was among the most vilified figures in the news industry, known for his morose management style and relentless cost cutting. Laura Davidson, NUJ senior organiser said it was good the uncertainty over Reach’s future had ended.

International

Building power, fighting for safety

How can journalists' unions promote women's rights and their safety at work, build strong gender-friendly structures and fight gender-based violence?

This was the question asked by the International Federation of Journalists at an online conference on 22 November which brought together journalist trade unionists and feminist campaigners from around the globe.

The conference was opened by Dominique Pradalie, IFJ president, and her colleague Maria Angeles Samperio said it was important that women were part of the decision-making structures in unions, especially on this issue.

The NUJ's work has documented the rise of online abuse and other threats to women journalists, and Michelle Stanistreet, one of the keynote speakers, said the statistics outlined in the report **The Chilling** were very familiar.

Julie Posetti, Global Director of Research at the International Center for Journalists and co-editor of the report, published by ICFJ with support from Unesco, said that 20 per cent of the women surveyed said that online abuse had led to targeting offline. While online abuse has a significant psychological impact, in other cases such as that of Maltese journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, there was a direct link to her murder. The research found that 41 per cent of the abuse was part of orchestrated disinformation campaigns by government states. In all cases, it is about trying to silence women's voices. It works; many women withdraw from social media and avoid writing about certain topics.

One consequence of the sheer volume of abuse is that it has become normalised as part of the job. Only a quarter reported



these threats to their employer, because they did not trust them to act. Women feel that they have to "suck it up" said Michelle, but that must stop. The NUJ was taking practical steps to change this culture and as a member of the UK government's National Committee for the Safety of Journalists she was working with industry bodies, the police and judiciary. The union has launched a **set of videos to raise awareness of the issue and a mini-app safety toolkit.**

The issues were not confined to conflict zones and despotic states, she said, increasingly UK and Irish journalists were attacked while covering protests, targeted by the far right and in Northern Ireland received death threats from so-called paramilitary groups when they investigate their criminal activities.

Heba Kandil, of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, said the **TRFilter**, developed by the foundation, allowed users to filter

out online attacks, document online harassment and abuse, and take control of their social media feeds.

In Tanzania, many women journalists have no contractual work rights, making them even more vulnerable to sexual harassment from the male managers in media houses. Maureen Odunga, a reporter at the Daily News, has organised workshops on gender equity and safety for women, with support from the Norwegian Union of Journalists and Journalists Workers Union of Tanzania; her union is now 70 per cent female.

Women in Paraguay work in a hostile environment where men hold "a toxic view of women" said Concepcion Oviedo, gender secretary of the Paraguayan Journalists Syndicate. Her union has acted on behalf of women members and succeeded in putting perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence in jail.

Jane Pillinger, co-author of *Stopping Gender Based Violence and Harassment at Work*, said the International Labour Organisation's Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work, which came into force in 2021 provides a **framework and blueprint** for unions to use as part of collective bargaining and workplace policies for all workers, freelance and staff and includes domestic violence. It has been ratified by 21 countries, but more need to follow suit.

IFIP IFJ International Federation of Journalists

IFJ Safety Fund

The IFJ's Safety Fund is a lifeline for journalists facing violence, persecution, threats, loss of income and needing medical treatment.

Make a donation now: <https://www.ifj.org/safety-fund.html>