



July 2020 Branch

Welcome to the July edition of NUJ Branch, a special newsletter providing information and news for branches during the present crisis. Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary, gives an update on her work supporting members facing redundancy, government-level talks on journalist safety and a dirty deal denying our members their human rights.

As the voice of journalists and journalism, the NUJ prides itself on being there for its members through good times and bad. As redundancy announcements build, this is definitely a challenging time for many and it's important to remember your union has your back.

There will be many of you who have slogged your guts out to put out stories and information about the pandemic, whilst juggling work with lessons for your kids, caring for a relative, or worrying about a parent all alone in a care home. It's been tough and unremitting. And now some of you have been rewarded by a letter from your employer saying your job is at risk. It's been the realisation of worst fears for many people put on furlough, who've lost sleep at being plunged into a no-man's land which felt like the waiting room for redundancy.

The NUJ is here to fight for your job and – as we have already done – make employers come up with more reasonable redundancy deals and timetables, and secure commitments to any job losses being on a voluntary basis not compulsory, ensuring equality impact assessments and stress tests are carried out, forging guarantees about workload for staff who will remain. Special reps' training is taking place to support chapel committees through this difficult time.

The list of journalist cuts outlined on page 2 makes for sober reading. I know

all of you in your chapels and branches have been there for each other. Thanks to everyone who's helping in that work – writing to your MPs, fighting for your colleagues' jobs and building support for the NUJ's Recovery Plan. Turning around the fortunes of the media industry is vital – we want this crisis to mark a turning point.

All of this work, is what makes the NUJ tick. That's also why it is outrageous to see how NUJ members at Iran International have been so shabbily treated by an unprincipled and hapless organisation, the British Association of Journalists. A dirty sweetheart deal clinched behind closed doors with management has denied our chapel – the overwhelming majority of editorial workers – the collective voice they have been working to secure. Over the past three years the NUJ has supported them with a range of workplace issues, but also over the outrageous harassment and intimidation they and their families have suffered at the hands of Iranian state officials. Matthew Myatt, BAJ general secretary, claimed to an NUJ official that he had been surprised by the offer, but justified it by saying it was like walking past a sweet shop when the owner comes out with a big bag of sweets and offers them to you for free. "Of course you're going to say yes."

Yep, this is a man who sees journalists, under threats from the Iranian authorities and denied their human rights by an organisation purporting to be a trade union, as akin to pick 'n' mix.



The chapel wrote to BAJ to say: "As a chapel of minority ethnic workers, our voice has been completely taken away from us by an organisation that pretends to stand up for workers."

Following my invitation to join the government's newly-launched National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, I attended its first meeting this week, chaired by John Whittingdale, the minister for media and data, alongside representatives from the press, police, prosecution services, civil service and media freedom groups. I gave a presentation of the range of challenges facing journalists. The aim is to develop a much-needed national action plan to ensure journalists can operate without fear of violence or abuse. The government is very keen for the NUJ to play a strong role in creating a framework to protect journalists from the worrying increase in attacks and harassment they face, and we'll be consulting with members in the coming weeks about how this can be best achieved. Funnily enough BAJ weren't invited.

In Solidarity,

Michelle Stanistreet

Covid 19 cuts begin to bite

Newspaper groups and the BBC have announced swingeing cuts across the board caused by, they say, ongoing structural problems in the industry and the effects of Covid-19.

Reach – owner of titles including the Mirror, The Express, Manchester Evening News, Wales Online, OK! magazine, the Bristol Post, Nottinghamshire Live and Leicestershire Live – said it was cutting 550 jobs to make £35 million

savings; and would introduce a more centralised structure and close titles.

The union has identified more than 60 proposed job cuts at Newsquest, publisher of the Glasgow Herald, Brighton Argus and Northern Echo, with the axe falling heaviest on sports departments and photographic desks. The cuts will hurt, since the group already operates on small editorial teams. In Newport in Wales, 23 roles out of a total of 164 employees are to go.

The Guardian is to lose 70 in editorial. The BBC announced 450 job cuts across England, one in six across the board in TV, radio and online – these are in addition to 150 jobs going in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A further 270 jobs are to go from News (including 120 announced in January, and paused during lockdown), with more in the pipeline. An NUJ campaign managed to save the regional Sunday Politics shows being dropped and won a partial reprieve for the regional, current affairs strand, Inside Out,

which will go from 11 programmes to production of six made by regional hubs; current-affairs programmes will no longer be made in Plymouth, Southampton, Tunbridge Wells, Nottingham or Salford.

BBC local radio, which has played a major role in bringing communities together during the pandemic with its Make a Difference campaign, will shed 139 staff. The “simplified” schedule, with three daytime shows instead of four and one host per show will remain.

While listening figures may be declining, local radio is often a lifeline and friend for older people. While it comes into its own during crises, such as flooding and virus attacks, it’s also, as BBC Radio Humberside’s Andy Comfort said, “there for our listeners every day, rain or shine”.

Research firm, Enders Analysis, forecast that media advertising revenue could fall by almost a third and estimated that 5,000 journalists and dozens of publishers were at risk. That is why the NUJ has launched its News Recovery Plan to guide the industry through the crisis with a set of pragmatic strategies and to establish a more diverse, quality, public-interest media.

Work has continued to gain support. The Scottish Conservatives have adopted many of the plan’s proposals following meetings with the Edinburgh Freelance Branch. Scottish National Party MP, Alyn Smith, is to draft a motion based on the plan to present to his party’s national conference.

Action

Link up with local broadcasting and newspaper chapels and work with them to lobby local and national politicians in support of the industry.

News Recovery Plan UK:

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

& Ireland:

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

Support NUJ Iran International

Messages of support and solidarity have been flooding in to members of the NUJ Iranian chapel – victims of a dirty deal which has prevented them from being represented by the union of their choice.

Iran International is a Persian-language television channel owned by Volant Media UK Ltd. The NUJ has been active supporting members there with a whole range of workplace issues since the channel was established nearly three years ago. It has also worked to protect them and their families from intimidation and harassment by Iranian state officials.

The NUJ initiated recognition talks with Iran International in an effort to reach a voluntary recognition agreement but, since a meeting in January, the company has refused to engage with the union, either directly or through the arbitrator ACAS.

Then, despite being in the formal process of recognition with the NUJ it revealed it had signed a recognition deal with the obscure British Association of Journalists. This cynical move was intended

to deliberately block the NUJ by teaming up with an organisation that in a clear breach of workers' rights. As it stands, UK law does not properly protect workers from having a union with no workplace members foisted on them by their bosses. The Labour peer and labour law expert Lord Hendy QC is lodging a complaint with the International Labour Organisation on behalf of the NUJ.

There is now a BAJ "rep", a senior member of management. Meanwhile staff report they are being put under pressure to join BAJ, which is not affiliated to the TUC.

As the chapel committee said in a letter to BAJ last Saturday night, asking it to step back from this deal: "As a chapel of minority ethnic workers, our voice has been completely taken away from us by an organisation that pretends to stand up for workers. Our aspiration as journalists in exile has been to exercise our right to

association and trade union work in the UK. However, unfortunately, we regret to see that we have been denied such rights yet again. Many of us know these tactics well, we have seen in Iran how something fake is created in an attempt to devalue the original." BAJ dismissed the letter as "inflammatory".

The NUJ has made the BAJ aware, in the strongest terms possible, that it believes it has acted unethically and in a totally unprincipled way by denying a collective voice for the staff with the union they want, and by acting as a puppet of the employer.

The NUJ remains prepared to continue to negotiate with Iran International to achieve a sensible outcome that respects and properly represents the wishes of the majority of the workers in the bargaining unit.

Action

Send messages of solidarity – personal and as a branch – to

campaigns@nuj.org.uk

Tweet support using the hashtags

#Solidarity4NUJIranInt
#TURightsAreHumanRights, #BAJofShame,
tagging **@the_baj** and **@FlyMyatt**

Write to your MP or get the support of any other organisations you know which support trade union freedom, to expose this dirty, sweetheart deal of BAJ's, which denies our members their basic human rights.

Write a blog in support.

This threat must be seen off.

COVID-19

Going viral

Annabelle Collins, Health Service Journal senior correspondent, reveals what it was like to work at the sharp-end as a specialist during the pandemic.



At the beginning of March staff at the Health Service Journal (HSJ) were told to expect to dedicate the next three weeks to coronavirus coverage. A colleague was appointed 'coronavirus correspondent'. It was not much later that we were all sent to work at home and the enormity of the situation began to sink in.

HSJ takes pride in not getting scooped when it comes to all things NHS, even by the national press. But this time the competition was like nothing we had experienced before - we were chasing the same story as not only every other health correspondent in the world, but every news journalist too. We had to move fast and dig into our expertise, which gave us an edge when reporting a pandemic of this scale.

We were now a Covid-specialist publication and told to only chase stories about the virus. Our editor decided to bring down the pay wall.

We were breaking important stories and uncovering new information that needed to be read. We also had to ensure we did not dilute our content for our regular readers - NHS leaders and managers who are experiencing the pandemic first-hand. What intelligence could we add for them?

We spoke to as many regional and national contacts as possible. The strong links we had already established in NHS leadership undoubtedly gave us a reporting edge. People trusted us with information, tips and leaked documents.

Nearly all our stories were picked up by the national media. I think everyone in the team felt the responsibility of our role reporting the unprecedented impact Covid-19 had on the NHS and its workforce.

Some stories will stay with us forever. We were the first publication to reveal the detailed clinical model for the first Nightingale Hospital in London, published plans to dilute nursing staffing ratios as never seen before and break news of the first

critical incident relating to Covid in a London hospital. We were also one of the first specialist publications to be asked on to the daily government briefing. However, what benefited our reporting more was regularly speaking to high-level NHS contacts and looking beyond the government's press releases.

And then the testing debacle. We broke the news that on the day of the deadline the government changed the way it counted the number of Covid-19 tests in order to hit the target of 100,000. The story was brought up in the daily briefing but was denied by the government. We stuck to our guns.

During our coverage of the pandemic we experienced our highest day of traffic ever, with almost 300,000 users visiting our specialist site. This was remarkable to see, but we are now adapting our coverage again as the health service is adapting again. However, we know Covid-19 is unlikely to disappear from our news lists any time soon.

NUJ Extra

NUJ Extra, the union's welfare charity, has extended its package for those affected by Covid-19 until August. Find out the latest news and how to donate or apply for aid: <https://bit.ly/2ZUqisi> The charity's lawyers, Thompsons, provide a debt support service for free to all members.

Save BBC Radio

Alex Dyke and Bethan Nimmo on why their listeners love them and why local radio matters

Alex Dyke loves his job on BBC Radio Solent. His weekday Wall of Sound and the upbeat Weekend Wall of Sound, formerly Bubblegum and Cheese, were hugely popular. Despite being up against Steve Wright during the afternoon, he still managed to pull in names such as Rick Astley and Tony Hadley and broke new acts.

He has been on air almost every day since 1986. "My show is my identity," he said. "And now I have been told it's not coming back." More than 2000 messages in support have landed on his Facebook page. "I have invested so much in my listeners," he said. "My popularity has meant for nothing, and now I am going to have to put my home on the market."

Political reporter Beth Nimmo has picked up the phone in her BBC Oxford Radio studio on Christmas Day and been the only other human that person heard say Merry Christmas to. She said: "We are so much more than a newsroom just

churning out radio and TV shows. As important as our journalism is, and I think it's absolutely crucial to society, we give our audience so much more. I have supported someone who was suicidal.

During the pandemic people have needed our help and companionship while cut off from their normal networks of support."

As part of the 450 cuts' package in England, 139 jobs will go in local

radio and the daytime output will go from four shows a day to three.

Bethan said: This crisis has shown how much we need the people on the frontline of local broadcasting. That's why we must fight to save our jobs."

Bethan's blog <https://bethannimmo.wordpress.com/2020/07/03/my-tribute-to-local-radio-and-why-we-should-protect-it-2/>



Freelances

The Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) has voted to fund an extension of the BBC Academy's Lockdown Learning workshops into August, so they will be free to NUJ freelance members. Watch out for an email giving the next set of courses.

FEU Training runs free workshops. Book now for workshops to help you to maximise the potential of your technology; manage your finances; and diversify your portfolio. There is a webinar on Friday 24 July to help you get motivated and re-gain your mojo. More information on the FEU website: <https://www.feustraining.org/online-workshops/>

Write

Write to your MP asking them to lobby against the local radio cuts:

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/letter-to-mp-on-bbc-local-radio-cuts/>

Tweet support of your local BBC radio station

Invite a member from your local station to your branch

I'll be your buddy

In tough times, the union can be there to help colleagues avoid mental distress and solve their problems, says tutor Caroline Holmes

Working from home when it all started didn't seem too bad – no commuting, wearing hoodies or shorts and a T-shirt and being able to Zoom into meetings anywhere had their advantages.

But more than three months down the line it is feeling different. Balancing a laptop on your knee in the bedroom and using the bedside table as a desk is not a long-term solution. For many put on furlough there was the constant fear they would be first in line when the redundancies started. And now they have. Huge numbers of freelancers who watched their work dry up became desperate because they had no access to the government's Covid-19 financial packages.

People still working also became anxious as they hardly ever heard from their line manager. Those on their own began to suffer from loneliness, others with families were run ragged, juggling work and key stage 2 maths tuition. It has all taken a toll on people's mental health.

The NUJ was there to help, Caroline Holmes (pictured), head of the union's reps' training programme told a Zoom meeting for reps on supporting members' health and wellbeing.

She said: "We are not mental health experts, but the union has prepared lots of information; we can signpost people to expert organisations and put in place practical steps to help. We recommend ways employers can provide safe working from home and a safe return to the office. We can reach out to members. A buddy system can be a useful strategy, encouraging people to pair up with one another, keeping in contact or inviting colleagues along to branch meetings. This is can be vital for freelancers, who are not in a chapel structure. As reps we must safeguard our own mental health and watch our workloads. I have prepared a webinar offering useful tips."

One rep has sent out a survey to colleagues (including non-members) asking whether they have the right kit for working from home. Having the proper gear can reduce stress. The NUJ can help set up such surveys.

John Toner, national organiser Scotland, recommended union members become mental health first-aiders and get their employer to pay for training.



Ann Galpin, chair of the NUJ Disabled Members Council, said: "For people already dealing with mental distress, the lockdown may have cut them off from support networks, treatment and their usual means of managing their mental health. They may be further frustrated because they need extra help to be able to work virtually and digitally."

Helping you to stay fit and healthy at home and work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnOBDSU8yU&feature=youtu.be>

Info

You can watch the NUJ's supporting members' health and wellbeing webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvNjBUvUjTI&feature=youtu.be>

NUJ mental health awareness podcast, advice, tips, checklists, links to expert organisations and mental first-aid training: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/mental-health-awareness-week-2020/>

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

Learning new tricks

Using lockdown to get extra skills can open doors – and the sky’s the limit



It has not been easy being a travel writer during the Covid-19 crisis. Victoria Trott, who specialises in writing about Europe, has lost work, commissions and is owed money by one of her clients. “It’s been quite a challenge,” she said. Victoria has been grounded in Swansea since lockdown and decided to try out a new skill she had acquired the previous summer from a NUJ Wales Training course.

She has since started Trott Around Travel, a podcast about what life after lockdown will hold for travel and tourism across Europe. In the first episode, she discusses whether it is a good idea to travel to Spain this summer with the Daily Telegraph expert, Annie Bennett.

She said: “It’s given me great satisfaction putting it together and it’s a good way to maintain my profile. I’ve done a few courses with NUJ Wales; they have all been good and are great value.”

Andrew Draper, who runs a translation and journalism agency based in Porth in the Rhondda Valley, has also put an NUJ Wales Training workshop on making videos on his phone to good use. He shot film for

a successful campaign to stop the closure of the 24-hour accident and emergency unit at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital. He now has a potential new client who showed interest in video production. “At £38 it was a great price and it’s always good to have another skill to offer,” he said

Charlotte Graham is the proud owner of a drone qualification – and no one is more surprised than she is. Charlotte, a Yorkshire-based, freelance photographer, said: “I’m coming up to 60 and hadn’t expected to have had to acquire new skills to get work. But it’s been great. I’ve since taken some stunning pictures.”

When the Covid-19 crisis started, she moved to where the work was – away from her more usual “fluffy” subject matter – to cover the pandemic news story. It was interesting work, apart from not being able to find a toilet or anywhere

to eat, she said.

Then the national newspapers’ budgets tightened and, as ever, the freelancers were the first to be chopped. Charlotte’s other sources of work, the National Trust and Royal Horticultural Society, turned to the Press Association to put out pictures, so she did the online drone course with a company called Heliguy. “I could do it from my kitchen rather than the classroom, which suited me,” she said.

It soon paid off, with a half-page picture in The Daily Telegraph of a bird’s eye view of aircraft being taken out of storage at the Yorkshire Air Museum as it re-opened to the public. She has since signed a contract with London North Eastern Railway.

Look out for the bi-monthly NUJ Active for a listing of training opportunities.

- You can see Charlotte’s portfolio at www.charlottegraham.photography/
- Trott Around Travel: <https://anchor.fm/trottaroundtravel>
- Andrew Draper, Nordic International: <https://nordicinternational.co.uk/meet-the-team/>

Helping NUJ members effect real change

BBC

Samira Ahmed, NUJ member
represented by Thompsons Solicitors.
Image credit: NUJ

NUJ members are entitled to free, specialist legal advice and representation on:

- Personal injury - at or away from work, on the roads or on holiday
- Serious injury - including brain injuries and spinal cord injuries
- Special terms for medical negligence
- Employment law advice (accessed via your Chapel representative or the NUJ head office)
- Work-related emergency criminal law advice on 0800 587 7530
(non-emergency criminal law advice accessed via the NUJ head office)
- Online wills service
- Competitive rates for conveyancing

Your family is also covered for:

- Personal injury away from work, on holiday or on the roads
- Special terms for medical negligence

We at Thompsons care about your story, that's why we guarantee all current and retired NUJ members 100% compensation. No hidden costs. Student members also get free personal injury cover.

For more information, contact one of our specialist solicitors today.

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