



Comments made by Prince Harry and his wife about racism in the media has led to soul searching among the press and calls for greater measures to increase the diversity of our newsrooms, says Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary

It wasn't only the monarchy that was rocked by Prince Harry and Meghan's interview with Oprah Winfrey.

When the Society of Editors put out a statement rebutting the prince's assertion that the press was racist, it faced a massive backlash. Letters were signed by national newspaper editors and black and minority ethnic journalists saying it clearly showed an industry in denial and that editors must ensure their newsrooms and coverage reflect the societies we live in. Journalists and publications started to pull out of the organisation's Press Awards and furious members of the society's board put out another statement, saying "there was a lot of work to be done in the media to improve diversity and inclusion". The Society of Editor's executive director resigned.

In my statement to the press on the issue, I said anyone working in the industry knows fine well that there is much to be done before the sector can credibly inhabit the moral high ground when it comes to race and diversity. Journalism plays a special role in our society which means that media outlets have an added responsibility in walking the walk when it comes to putting diversity policies and warm words into practice. The NUJ continues to push for greater representation of black and minority ethnic journalists in newsrooms and – critically – in senior decision-making and leadership positions.

Our charity, the George Viner Memorial Fund, finances training courses for black and minority ethnic journalism students

– putting the union's commitment to diversity into practice that makes a tangible difference to representation in the industry. I urge branches to make donations, hold fund-raisers and call on our former scholars of the scheme to speak at meetings.

Our Black Members' Council said lessons needed to be learned from the royal interview with the Society of editors, using the alarming comments about the news media made by Harry and Meghan in their television interview to start a long-overdue debate about the best way to prevent racist coverage in future, including dealing with the gross under-representation of African, Caribbean, Asian and other people of colour in the UK media.

The TUC's equality conferences show just how important it is that we tell stories from all our communities – because it is women, disabled and black workers who have borne the brunt of Covid-19 – in terms of dying and losing their jobs.

Natasha Hirst, chair of the NUJ's Equality Committee, spoke about the attacks and intimidation of women journalists and we have all been deeply shocked and saddened by the murder of Sarah Everard and the tragic list of the 118 women and girls killed by men in the UK this year which Labour's shadow domestic violence minister, Jess Phillips, read out in parliament.

That is why the NUJ signed a TUC statement demanding safety, justice and equality and calling for a mandatory duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment at work and a cross-



departmental action plan to tackle the structural inequalities experienced by women, black communities, LGBT+ and disabled people in work, health, education, housing and justice.

One step forward is the publication of the government-backed National Committee for the Safety of Journalists' action plan to protect journalists from threats, abuse and intimidation. The union has been at the heart of this committee and welcomes the range of practical steps it proposes. There's a job of work to be done – but it's vital work that should be supported by all our branches. Find out more on page 2.

And finally, the end of the month will be a sad one for the union movement as the unionlearn project which each year supported around 200,000 workers in England with skills training and career development loses its government funding – a piece of political vandalism. The Federation of Entertainment Unions' project to support freelancers ended on a high note with all targets being hit and its workshops more popular than ever before.

In Solidarity

Michelle Stanistreet

Safety plan for journalists applauded by the NUJ

Measures to protect journalists have won support from the union and industry and have been endorsed by cross-party support

The safety of journalists has been a core issue and long-running campaign for the union, so the NUJ gave a big welcome to a government-backed National Action Plan to protect the press from threats, abuse and intimidation.

The union was an active member of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, convened

by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport with industry bodies, the Home Office, police and prosecution service.

Michelle Stanistreet gave a presentation at the committee's inaugural meeting last year detailing the range of harassment and abuse journalists are subjected to, simply for doing their jobs, backed up with data from the union's subsequent all-member survey. The study provided vital evidence, showing more than half of our members had experienced online abuse in the past year and nearly a quarter had been physically assaulted or attacked.

At the launch of the plan she said: "NUJ members shared horrific experiences of being attacked, abused and threatened - on and offline - simply for doing their job. It's clear that reported incidents are the tip of the iceberg and that harassment and abuse have become normalised.

"This plan, with its range of practical measures and protections, is an important step towards changing that and ensuring

journalists can get on with their vital work free from harassment or intimidation."

Key points

- The union has agreed to work with the Society of Editors on an online support kit for journalists and hold an annual survey to track the progress of the plan's measures.
- It will liaise with UK police representatives.
- The possibility of setting up an emergency safety fund for journalists under immediate threat of harm will be explored.
- Employers will be expected to provide safety training for staff and freelancers and establish designated safety officers.
- The document calls on social media platforms to do more to stamp out online abuse.
- The criminal justice system must ensure those who attack and threaten journalists are brought to justice.

Full report: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists>

Action

- Support all members under attack, notifying the police when necessary and reporting all incidents to the union.

- Encourage branch members to answer the Home Office call for evidence on threats to journalists.

- Put the safety plan on your next meeting agenda for discussion.

Covid-19: the unequal killer

Natasha Hirst, right, chair of the NUJ's Equality Council, on the TUC's equality conference season and who has been hardest hit by the pandemic



It's been a frantically busy fortnight for colleagues working on the union's equality committees during the TUC's equality conference season.

Usually, it is chance to network and socialise with colleagues from other unions. This year it was different – the conferences were held virtually. In some ways we lost the cut and thrust of debate, but it did allow more people to watch the debates, panel sessions and fringe meetings.

You always feel that surge of adrenaline when you rush to the podium and, I'm sorry to say, it was just as nerve-wracking to give a speech on Zoom, so I am very proud of my NUJ colleagues and the contributions they made.

We kicked off by publishing a survey of LGBT+ members which showed almost one-third had experienced bullying and discrimination at work as a result of their sexuality or gender identity. However, almost 70 per cent said their workplaces were inclusive and they could be open about their sexuality. A Zoom call of LGBT+ members to discuss the

survey findings has been arranged. Inevitably, Covid-19 also loomed large. While all of us have been affected by the pandemic, those bearing the brunt – in terms of dying or losing their jobs – are women, disabled and black workers.

At the TUC Women's Conference, I talked about the many women journalists withdrawing from online spaces because of the abuse they suffer. We heard how domestic abuse has increased under Covid-19 restrictions and that a woman or girl is killed by a man every three days. In response to our emergency motion about the spiralling attacks on women journalists, the TUC's women's committee agreed to express solidarity with women journalists and lobby for greater sanctions against the perpetrators of abuse.

Sara Lewis, vice-chair of the Equality Council, called for robust laws to improve employment equality since the UK's Equality Act was clearly failing to do its job. She said: "An NUJ survey found women in particular reported struggling to work from home while juggling

childcare, home schooling and other caring responsibilities. Our members reported unsympathetic bosses and little flexibility or support. Many were told to take annual or unpaid leave to care for their children."

NUJ delegate Ann Galpin said trade unionists needed to link equalities to the health and safety agenda to keep women safe at work, whether home- or office-based.

Ann was praised for her sterling work on the TUC's Disabled Workers' Committee. She has tirelessly promoted the social model of disability and took up the case of disabled freelance workers further marginalised because of Covid-19. She told conference an NUJ survey revealed that eight in 10 disabled members had not had reasonable adjustments organised through their workplace since the start of the pandemic.

Lynn Degele, NUJ Oxford branch, said trade unions must enforce reasonable adjustments for disabled workers – they must become normalised in the workplace so they could play a full role in their jobs and progress in their careers.

Covid-19 and Brexit spell a double blow

Cailin Mackenzie and Tony Sheldon explain how these threats have galvanised the union's Europe-based members and its Continental European Council

Despite our nearly 400 members being spread across thousands of miles of continental Europe and living under different national legislations, the dual threats of Covid-19 and Brexit have resulted in closer co-operation between branches and an increase in activity on behalf of our members.

Last year started with the branches poised to respond to Brexit, but before there was any progress on the transition negotiations the restrictions of living and working under the Covid-19 pandemic took effect. With branch activities being forced online, members spread out over large geographical distances and branches which only occasionally met through the Continental European Council (CEC) were able to keep in touch more often.

Branches gathered virtually and shared information and advice based on members' experiences and a briefing went to all members in Continental Europe, including those who are not in a branch. It covered reporting under Covid-19 restrictions, where to access financial

support, information for freelancers, and various other resources. NUJ Extra was mentioned as a possible source of support and donations to the union fund were forthcoming from the branches.

Meanwhile Brexit negotiations were floundering. When the European Commission issued guidance on the Withdrawal Agreement, the NUJ general secretary sought clarification on cross-border working for journalists, however this became moot following the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

The TCA makes no provision for journalists. Members who are UK nationals, travelling for work, do not know what paperwork – if any – they may need to cross borders and work legally. We may be a brief train ride from a riot or disaster but the relevant national rules to allow us to cover it are currently unclear or unavailable. The NUJ has not gone unheard on this issue, including at European Commission and Parliament level, and work is continuing.

Meanwhile, the mainstay of each

branch's work has continued in Paris, Brussels and the Netherlands – support for strike action, work on threats to journalists and attacks on press freedom, freelance terms and conditions, access to accreditation, and individual cases.

We are an active and committed part of the NUJ family, and Covid and Brexit have only made these branches stronger.

The union would like to hear how the changes have affected you. Contact: campaigns@nuj.org.uk



Confusion in the UK

The rules and laws determining how UK-based journalists work and cover stories in EU states has been equally fraught with obfuscation despite efforts by members of the union's Parliamentary Group to seek clarification. The NUJ had won a get-out on quarantine rules for journalists, but this was rescinded as Covid-19 infection rates rose. Rather than leaping on to Eurostar when a story breaks across the Channel, members are advised to check what is required from each member state.

CAMPAIGN

Policing Bill causes alarm

Michael Calderbank, of Solidarity Consulting, looks at the implications of this draconian legislation for journalists and the right to protest



The government's plan to give police wide-ranging new powers to clamp down on public protests, introduced as part of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (which has just received its Second Reading) has raised significant concerns among the public, unions and Parliament.

Shocking scenes on Clapham Common the previous weekend following the vigil for Sarah Everard, whose death led to serving Met police officer Wayne Couzens being charged with her murder and kidnap, saw women being manhandled and arrested as the authorities sought to use new offences under emergency Covid-19 legislation to disperse the crowd. The timing could hardly have been worse for Home Secretary Priti Patel's curbs on the ability to hold peaceful protests.

The Bill, despite its considerable length, barely gives women a mention. It contains no new measures, for instance, to help increase convictions for rape or sexual assault. As Opposition MPs pointed out, it would give a longer prison sentence for

attacking a statue than attacking a woman.

The proposed new powers were introduced with reference to Extinction Rebellion, arguing that non-violent protests which are disruptive of people's lives should be treated differently from licensed marches or static protests. The new powers would kick in if any person "suffers serious distress, serious annoyance, serious inconvenience or serious loss of amenity". Even lone protestors can be prosecuted if they create "noise" having a significant "impact" in the vicinity.

Further measures would limit the ability to hold protests near the Parliamentary estate, and introduce extra penalties for "unauthorised encampments", including where "distress" is caused by "the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or disorderly behaviour, or the display of any writing, sign, or other visible representation that is threatening, abusive or insulting".

Beyond this, the Bill is a ragbag of diverse new laws covering a wide range of policing, legal and penal

procedures. These include giving the police new powers to extract information from the digital devices of people of interest to criminal investigations. Whilst it does recognise that existing legal safeguards for confidential journalistic material need to be considered, the detail of how this will be ensured is at this stage nebulous until such time as the Secretary of State introduces "regulations" via secondary legislation.

I will be working with the NUJ's campaigns department and the union's Parliamentary Group to monitor any implications for journalists and photographers. We will raise concerns as the Bill faces line-by-line scrutiny during its Committee Stage and, given the scale of the government's majority, the best opportunity may be to oppose the worst elements of the Bill when it is debated in the Lords.

With the legislation in its early stages, there will further opportunities for members to raise awareness of the Bill. Branches can lobby MPs and build alliances with other unions and civil society groups opposing any clauses dangerous to journalists. The more cross-party opposition can be mobilised to raise concerns, the better the chances of forcing a significant climbdown.

Good morning Alexa...



Tim Dawson investigates voice-activated news services coming soon to a bedroom near you

What's the news Alexa?" is a question shouted in approximately five per cent of British homes every day. Seven per cent of US households make similar requests. It marks the advance of voice-activated speakers as a source of up-to-date information in a growing number of domestic environments.

There are now more than 100 million smart speakers in use around the world, including the Amazon Alexa, and Google Nest Hub. One in 10 British households own one. They are used most frequently to play pre-recorded music, but at least half are used to access broadcast news.

"Smart speakers are mostly replacing radios in the home, particularly in living-rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms," says Nic Newman of the Reuters Institute in a recent report. "Some regular users also say they spend less time with the television and with other screens. For many users, it is the first thing they interact with in the morning and the last thing at night."

Smart speakers are generally grouped with other verbally-

controlled devices under the collective term "voice", used rather as "mobile" is to describe phones. Big tech providers see this interface as the stepping stone to "the next billion" internet users, many in the developing world.

Each platform has a format designed to provide a quick update on the news. Amazon calls this a Flash Briefing, for example. In the UK the default provider is the BBC (NPR in the US). Users can change this during set up, but being the default confers obvious advantages. A dedicated unit within BBC radio news provides these chunks of atomised news.

As well as national news, localised Alexa-accessible BBC local news is now available in in many large metropolitan areas, including services in Welsh and Gujarati. "This is part of a wider effort by the BBC to use smart assistants to offer new local-level services," says Mukul Devichand, executive editor, BBC Voice + AI. "The aim is to bring trusted local news and information to audiences across the UK in a fast-moving situation, to counter confusion and misinformation."

Seven journalists are responsible

for four bulletins per day, with update times depending on the news cycle. Each is usually around 20 minutes long and includes three to four stories where listeners can call out "more" to hear a deeper dive.

"We are very different to the BBC's curated bulletins," says Laura Barrow, the editor of BBC interactive news. "The style of presentation is more conversational. The user has a different relationship with their interactive smart speaker."

Bite-sized news is not the corporation's only response to voice-activated technology. Currently in beta testing is a wholly synthesised character that will speak for the BBC in voice-based interactions.

Known as "Beeb" the initial intent is that it will form part of the interface whereby listeners navigate to services from Broadcasting House. It will also deliver jokes, recipes or pearls of wisdom upon request, many in the style of popular BBC programmes. Against this backdrop, you hardly need the imagination of a futurologist to foresee synthesised voices delivering the news itself. That would be a change, however, besides which the arrival of the internet or demise of hot metal might appear quite modest evolutions in news production.

Countdown to DM

Branches have been asked to confirm or amend their delegations to the online Delegate Meeting, on Friday 21 May and Saturday 22 May, by Wednesday 31 March and name a branch liaison officer to engage with the Standing Orders Committee in discussions and horse trading up to and during DM. The deadline for Late Notice Motions is noon Friday 14 May, and amendments noon on Wednesday 19 May. Please be disciplined when submitting LNMs. Delegates can make questions to the annual report, please submit by email in advance so answers can be secured and circulated to all delegates. The aim is to ensure full democracy within the challenges and constraints of a virtual DM. Many of the motions will be taken under SO3, in light of no opposition



from the NEC. The motion will be adopted as a DM resolution and become a part of the union's workplan and reported on in the DM's Fate of Motions Report. Many are already being followed and a report of work done to date will be published and circulated to branches in April. The NEC agreed a motion to DM to facilitate limited updates to rule changing motions. The deadline for this is noon on Monday 10 May.

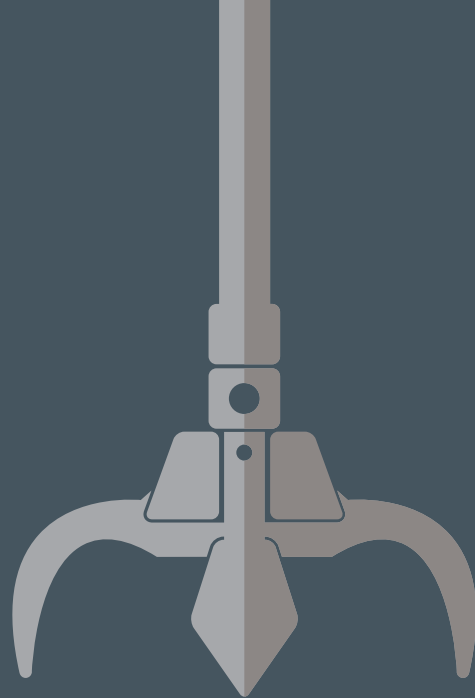
NUJ Extra Covid aid extended

The union's welfare charity is launching a third wave of support for NUJ members who have suffered lost work as a result of Covid-19 and lockdowns. NUJ Extra has committed to providing funding until the end of the government's roadmap to the removal of Covid lockdown, which runs to Monday 21 June. The union's all-member survey showed many people had seen their work dry up or had been made redundant during the pandemic. Branches should continue to make donations to NUJ Extra and encourage members needing help to apply for aid. More details on the NUJ website: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-extra-extends-covid-support-to-june.html>

Farewell unionlearn

Despite a desperate campaign, the government has not rescinded its vindictive plan to cut the £12m a year of funding the TUC's unionlearn, for union-led learning in England. The Federation of Entertainment Unions project had provided vital professional and practical training for workers in the media and creative industries. The workshops were nearly always over-subscribed and the project met all its targets. The website which has range of useful resources and webinars will be maintained by the FEU unions: <https://www.feustraining.org/>

REASONS TO JOIN



Diversity Matters

The media industry is one of the most socially exclusive. The NUJ fights to make the workplace socially inclusive and representative of the diverse society it serves. We protect the rights of our members and strive to ensure that media companies foster recruitment, promotion and retention of people from all backgrounds. The union has a proud record of challenging all forms of discrimination.

Are you keeping good company?

Join the NUJ today at

nuj.org.uk/join

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