The excitement of video

WE HAD a full house at the launch of Video Consortium’s newest chapter, hosted by London Freelance Branch at NUJ headquarters on 4 September. Over 60 filmmakers and friends joined us.

We began the night with a bit of networking and then officially kicked off the event with two videos: Enter Toledo, the Spanish City of Swords and I Live Alone in an Island Paradise from Jacob Harrell, a producer with the Great Big Story company.

Jacob described the funny and perilous way in which he found one of his interviewees, and why editing is his favourite part of film-making.

We then saw an advance screening of a short Guardian piece: Teranga, Life in the Waiting Room. Co-directors Lou Marlier,Sophia Seymour and Daisy Squires explained the beauty behind being able to equally share the responsibilities of co-directing a documentary. They discussed when and why they decided to turn the camera off and put the subject’s needs first. The night concluded with another Guardian documentary, Sam and the Plant Next Door, by director Ómer Sami, who joined us by online video call. He described the ways in which he found such dynamic characters and how he gained their trust.

The co-directors of the Video Consortium in London – Dobriyana Tropankeva, Jenny Marc and Chloe Mamlok – were excited by the positive response to the event.

Two of the night’s most popular questions were “Why hasn’t this happened in London before?” and “When will the next event like this be held?” The next event will again be hosted by London Freelance Branch in November, so keep an eye on www.londonfreelance.org to find out more.

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Freelances matter at Trades Union Congress

LONDON Freelance Branch Chair Penny Quinton was one of the National Union of Journalists’ representatives to the Trades Union Congress gathering in Brighton from 8 to 11 September. She spoke in support of Motion 29 from the Musicians’ Union, which calls on the UK trade union movement to recognise that in campaigning for improved terms and conditions for the “false self-employed” it is important to remember that many truly self-employed workers, particularly musicians and performers, are keen to maintain their self-employed status whilst still needing union representation.

Comrades, President –

I am Chair of London Freelance Branch of the National Union of Journalists – the largest Branch in the NUJ, with 3000 members. We find that within the trade union movement freelance work is often seen as an option of last resort.

This is not the case for many of our members, for whom the freedom of freelancing is a choice giving autonomy and control over our lives. However, our members, like any other workers, need the support of their union to tackle low pay and poor working conditions.

Smaller craft unions such as the NUJ and the Musicians’ Union and Equity have a wealth of experience in representing creatives.

We ask that the TUC utilise this body of knowledge in developing collective bargaining arrangements for our sector – for unless authors and performers are paid fairly for the skilled work that we do there is little hope of a vibrant and diverse cultural and news industry representing the voices of a diverse world that is not just pale, male and stale.

Our members are often told that because they love their work publicity is “sufficient recompense”. Try telling your telephone provider that you will Tweet your gratitude for their services and that good publicity is enough!

TUC: we need you!

This is not just a battle for freelance workers. We in the NUJ have with the International and European Federations of Journalists – placing the creative rights of workers at the heart of the global trade union agenda.

The motion was passed. A motion from the actors’ union Equity calling on the UK government to implement the recent EU copyright directive fully into UK law was also passed.

Other members of the delegation were general secretary Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ president Sian Jones, and NEC members Steve Bird and Chris Frost. The NUJ proposed two motions, calling for strengthening of the International Labour Organization and for campaign for government to fully fund free TV licences for over-75s and for the creation of a sustainable funding model for the BBC. Both were passed.

Undercover cops and trade unions

THERE’S an important conference on Undercover Policing and Trade Unions on Saturday 16 November. Co-hosted by groups including the Blacklist Support Group and Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance (COPS), it will bring together trade unionists and activists to share information on undercover policing in trade unions and protest groups.

Unionised workers in the construction industry are known to have been the subject of a blacklist maintained by firms such as the Consulting Organisation. Some data on that list could only have come from undercover police, according to former undercover officer Peter Francis. Journalists with press cards covering demonstrations and actions – in particular the coaches travelling to Fairfield bomber base to protest the 2003 Iraq War – are known to be among those detained as a result of intelligence from “undercovers”. The ongoing Undercover Policing Inquiry – not now expected to conclude before 2023 – includes NUJ members who may have come into contact with undercover police in the course of reporting.

The Branch passed a motion at its September meeting encouraging members to attend the conference, from 10.15 to 5.30 at the University of Greenwich, 30 Park Row, London SE10 9LS. For details and to register see www.bit.ly/FL-COPS.

You’re nicked

Freelance photographer Guy Smallman was arrested while covering a planned drone protest at Heathrow on 18 September. Doubtless coincidentally, soon after Branch Chair Penny Quinton Tweeted to @metpoliceuk “for avoidance of any doubt here are stories his images were used on in the past week…” Guy was released, after more than nine hours at Wandsworth police station. Assistant Freelance organiser David Ayrton told the Morning Star that the union was “disturbed and concerned” that a member was arrested while working; the NUJ will be discussing with Guy the possibility of legal action.

Policing matters

Members of the NUJ’s Photographers’ Council continue to meet with police to press the case that journalists must be allowed to report without interference. They are extending discussions to cover private security guards, who are increasingly seen “stewarding” street events. They have the impression that there is an increase in interference by police. To report all kinds of interactions between police and your journalism, please use the form at www.londonfreelance.org/policing.