Transcribers are revolting at rev.com

SOON AFTER we reported Angus Batey mentioning his use of transcription service rev.com at the September London Freelance Branch meeting, Andrew Draper (on Twitter @nordicandrew) alerted us to the company’s unilateral one-third cut in the rate it pays human transcribers for example with this tweeted by subscribers. The transcribers are resisting using the rev.com machine transcription service at the company sees sense. 

As @slatornews then pointed out, this was “retweeted thousands of times and… picked up by a number of media sites” – including a piece in the New York Times: “How a Gig Worker Revolt Begins”. And see www.bit.ly/FL-rev for details of a petition.

We’re still pondering the ethics of using the rev.com machine transcription service. Instinct says not to, until the company sees sense.

Readers have pointed us to the machine transcription service at www.otter.ai © Mike Holderness

Support Turkish journalists

WRITER Ahmet Altan was re-arrested in mid-November, just eight days after he was released from prison in Turkey. Detained in the wake of the attempted coup of July 2016, Ahmet has been a focus for English PEN, who are asking journalists and authors to write messages in support of him. There’s more information on Ahmet at www.ahmetal-tanmethelaltan.com – Turkey remains the world’s biggest jailer of journalists.

There is also concern for the safety of Nurcan Baysal, a Kurdish journalist from Turkey, currently studying in London. Her house in Diyarbakir, Turkey was raided twice by police in 2019. In June some 20 anti-terrorism police broke down the doors and arrested her – over her Tweet on the Turkish invasion of Arfin, Syria: “Children and adults die every time a bomb falls.” In October police raided the house: Nurcan has still not been informed of the reason for that raid, or told whether there is a criminal investigation against her.

She is concerned that she will be unable to visit her family in Turkey: see www.bit.ly/FL-Nurcan.

BRITAIN MAY BE “a secular nation”, religious media centre (RMC) speaker Kate Christopher told LFB’s November meeting, yet “twelve per cent of the population believe in angels.” So, she reckoned, a fundamental message to journalists reporting on faith issues is that “belief is really complex and messy.”

Further, it’s a subject with which reporters tend to have a low level of empathy given that they’re “a rather unreligious group – 60 per cent claim no affiliation at all”! Hence the Centre’s training-and-information set-up – religiously neutral and universal (embracing paganism and rastafarianism, for instance).

Her RMC colleague Dr Michael Minnick, a former journalist who is now a researcher specialising in Islam and the media, noted that although 4.8 per cent of the UK population identify as Muslim only 0.4 per cent of journalists do likewise: “That means Islam is a big story covered by a lot of journalists who don’t have much connection with it and don’t know where to go to get the information they need.”

Illustrating the “complex and messy” side, he said Islam had many branches, such as Sunni, Shia, Sufi and Ahmadiyya... the first three perhaps familiar, the last not – and controversial within the faith: “Some say the Ahmadiyya community are not Muslims. But they are bidding for recognition in the mainstream. Journalists need to know there are strong feelings on all sides and invest in understanding the complexity. It will be worthwhile.”

RMC’s Rabbi Alex Goldberg, Chaplain at Surrey University – who is fundraising to build a mosque, synagogue and chapel under the same roof there – echoed the emphasis on diversity within faiths, pointing out that among his 160 Jewish students he knew of eight different groups represented.

“If you are reporting a religious story,” he added, “get the level of knowledge you’d think appropriate on a political story. Don’t think it’s less important to the people involved.”

The other member of the speaker team, Ruth Peacock, 20-year BBC journalist and launch director of the RMC, set out how the Centre is a charity offering links, contacts, fact sheets and training courses for journalists, academics – and faith groups as well, to educate them about dealing with the media, especially if they’ve been “burned” in the past.

“Religious literacy: there’s a lack of it across society – including media professionals,” she said. “The idea is for the Centre to be a bridge between religious organisations and media and journalists. Because there’s a gulf between them.”

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• A member’s experience negotiating with a charity that wanted all rights in their work;
• A higher minimum wage for freelancers: how would that work, then? and
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 Freelance Dec 2019 / Jan 2020 • 5