

Minority reporters

THE DISPROPORTIONATELY low representation of Black and ethnic minority people in media was the focus of the October London Freelance Branch meeting. Our speaker was Kurt Barling, until recently Special Correspondent for BBC London and now Professor of Journalism at Middlesex University. Kurt was producer of the BBC's *Black Britain* and his BBC documentary *Who Killed PC Blakelock?* won multiple awards.

Weeks after he joined the BBC, Kurt was sent to Berlin when the Wall came down – he spoke fluent German. He was one of the first to film in the DDR after the Wall's fall. Back at the BBC, however, he "soon discovered a hostile environment for those that don't fit in... for a young man of colour." The BBC then was

"an Oxbridge culture," now it's "predominantly a Russell Group culture".

On one occasion Kurt found "a note in my pigeonhole asking me to present my qualifications" to be verified. Kurt's girlfriend told him, "You should go to war on this." So Kurt wrote a letter "back to that particular individual, cc'd to 30 or 40 of the most senior people I could think of in the BBC". The manager who'd sent the original note came "almost in tears," to plead with Kurt, "don't ruin my career... I only meant it as a joke".

A few years later, Kurt was assistant producer of the BBC's *Black Britain*. It lasted for "for or five series" and won multiple awards. But some of the *Black Britain* team later told Karl that they found the BBC "didn't

make them feel comfortable either as people or a journalists."

Kurt left the BBC in April. They sacked him not because he was Black, but to save money, he was "too expensive". Kurt noted "a conflict going on there..." The BBC is good at recruiting minority journalists, but "woefully bad at retaining them."

Journalism is "not a hugely appealing trade for minorities." Parents say, 'Become an engineer, an electrician, a plumber, you'll make some real money... (as a) journalist you won't be welcome.' The industry's historically not been a good place to earn a solid living, "working class parents have not encouraged" their children to enter it.

Gone are the traineeships in which you learnt the craft from the age of 18. Entry-level training is now "devolved to universities", this is "a barrier to entry... inevitably people from lower socio-economic backgrounds... don't have the access they used to."

Where, asked Kurt, "did all those... ethnic minority journalists go?" A lot seem to move into PR after around six or seven years, "they feel they're in a hostile environment." While BBC Director General Tony Hall wrote to Kurt to say "what a great pity the BBC let go of me... nobody asked me where I went."

The BBC "should do an exit interview with anyone who leaves the organisation, Black, female or whatever, get Tony Hall to sort it."

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● A longer version online has links.



Kurt Barling (right) in conversation with LFB Chair Dave Rotchelle (left)

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Make a living from e-books?

CAN JOURNALISTS make a living out of e-book publishing? NUJ vice-president Tim Dawson looked at some recent e-publishing models that work for authors at November's LFB meeting. (Other new models for funding journalism are catalogued at the newmodeljournalism.com blog, which Tim co-founded.)

The most dependable moneymakers, Tim reckons, are ebooks. There is an expectation among readers that they will pay for books and the move from paper to screen has not seen a shift in this attitude.

Tim began by mentioning Helen Smith, an author believed to have made all her living – £30-40,000 a year – from sale of e-book titles on Amazon. His point was you could

make a go of it if you really tried.

Alastair Robertson's had fishing and shooting column in *The Scotsman* for years. Finding that people frequently approached him with questions, Alastair decided to write a 100-page paperback, at around thirty to forty thousand words. A run of 3000, at £10 per copy, almost sold out. The ebook version was priced at £5 and has also been a good seller, with far lower production costs.

Then there's Rupert Colley, who did short history books on narrow subjects – such as aspects of WWI. When he went to e-books he moved up from not much to selling 250,000 a year. His series of books was bought up by HarperCollins. Tim further described Rupert's market as "people who are interested in

reading up on a subject in an hour" who want bluffers' guides at £2-3 – especially for anniversaries and centenaries.

Tim then raised Endeavour Press, one company specialising in e-book collections of stuff, mostly journals selling collections of their "best work". Endeavour reckon they sell 15,000 a week of their catalogue and will make "you" more money via their "mastery of Google's algorithms".

Peter Jukes on his own initiative covered the Coulson-Brookes trial, attending every day and Tweeting "nuggets" – moment-by-moment reports – as well as creating www.hackingtrial.com. As he got stuck

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LFB meetings

12 January
Branch Annual
General Meeting:
elects Committee

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