

March 2015

FALSE FREELANCES

LFB meetings
13 April
Mark Thomas on
opposing cops spying
on journalists
11 May
To be announced
See back page &
[www.twitter.com/
NUJ_LFB](http://www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB)

Get it written!

HUNTER Davies, star speaker at February's London Freelance Branch meeting, started working as a journalist the old way – on a Cumberland local paper in 1958. He's been freelance since 1980.

Just the day before the meeting he'd had a *Sunday Times* column opening "Office workers may envy freelancers their freedom, but Hunter Davies is a slave to his returns..." and he'd already "written about this evening's event in the *New Statesman* football column this week".

Hunter announced, "this is the first time in my life I've been asked to speak about freelancing." At Durham University he "shared a room with the advertising manager of the student union paper, and he was giving it up. So I took it on. One day there was a gap in the paper: I did 'a day in the life of a rowing hearty'... 'a day in the life of a science student'

followed." One day the heading accidentally came out as "A life in the day" and 20 years later at the *Sunday Times* colour mag "I gave the column that name."

In 1958 he went to the *Evening Chronicle* in Manchester on £14 a week – "more than my father had ever earned". The chief reporter took him round to fires and murders, did an interview, then went to a phone box "and rattled off a story." After he "carefully wrote out the story" of a local disaster and "missed the first edition," Hunter discovered the chief "only had three opening paragraphs" – he'd just recite one and keep going.

The 1960s "in fact began in 1965, when I took over Atticus (a *Sunday Times* column). Suddenly all the things I was interested in, like photographers and the North were 'in'..."

In that year "Margaret [Mrs Da-

vies] did *Georgy Girl*, I did *Here We Go, Round the Mulberry Bush*." Both books became Hollywood films. And Hunter did an authorised Beatles biography, pitched as "a proper hardback book, to deal with all those questions they got asked... such as "what were Strawberry Fields?" Paul McCartney referred Hunter to Beatles manager Brian Epstein, who suggested "a clause that no one else would get access for two years after publication." The book came out in 1968, the year before the Beatles split, making Hunter Davies's *The Beatles* the band's only authorised biography.

Meanwhile, *Sunday Times* editor Harold Evans wanted to open up the back of the colour supplement, an "advertising desert", since ads appearing opposite articles paid twice as much. After costly experimentation involving "staff... money... people vanishing across the world for weeks", Hunter "took the staff for lunch and pitched 'A life in the day'." Hunter ended up including "Guy the Gorilla – and began making people up too": the column's still around today.

Unless, says Hunter, "you're in charge of a little area, they'll eat you up". The next most important thing is keeping in with the editor of your section. You are "so lucky," he says, "if you have a personal relationship with the people you're dealing with."

Hunter's daughter is a freelance journalist too and he "does feel sorry for the modern journalist – and not just for the obvious things like the demise of lunch."

In conclusion, Hunter offered one of his "pieces of wisdom... 'Don't get it right, get it written.' That doesn't mean 'get it wrong' – it means 'get it done'." There's far, far more online.

Hunter Davies: Photo © Hazel Dunlop

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Rights for 'false freelances'

THE COURT of Justice of the European Union has ruled that trade union collective agreements may include provision for workers who are not employed but are, in the Court's phrase, "false self-employed". These agreements may include provisions setting minimum rates. The case will be of particular interest to freelancers in Ireland, where the NUJ and other unions have been told by government that they may not even produce lists of rates.

The workers in the case in question are substitutes for orchestra members in the Netherlands. So the ruling appears to cover people who

work under the direction of a client at a place and time of the client's choosing, but only sporadically. That would be subbing shifts, or photography paid by the day, to you.

Crucially, the ruling has no effect on laws that say when employer and client organisations must negotiate with unions. So its direct effect applies only where they are already willing to negotiate. Collective agreements still must not include the "genuine self-employed", such as writers paid by the word or image-makers by the pixel. That continues to be seen as a "cartel" – as if freelances were liable if allowed to get

together to manipulate the market as did the 19th-century US railroads.

The European Federation of Journalists is talking with the European Commission about possible ways to improve the situation. In Germany, all authors – staff and freelance – are entitled by law to "equitable remuneration" and to negotiate minimum terms agreements, under the 2002 law governing authors' rights contracts (*Urhebervertragsrecht*). It took until 2010 to reach an agreement with the newspaper publishers and agreement has still not been reached

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