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# FREE

## Fair deals at C4

DOROTHY BYRNE, head of News and Current Affairs at Channel Four, was our speaker at the LFB meeting in September. Dorothy is a former editor of *The Big Story* and a former *World in Action* producer, and a union activist with first the NUJ and now BECTU. She described herself as “the oldest woman in TV.” When she started out there were “more women than men” in TV current affairs, but the women “gradually disappear, like in an Agatha Christie novel”.

Of exploitation of freelances, Dorothy noted that “nearly everyone who works outside the news for Channel 4 is a freelance.” C4 “doesn’t directly make any of its own programmes”: these are “commissioned from independent production companies... People working on C4 current affairs programmes are usually two [steps] away from me.”

Dorothy says, “If a film gets commissioned, it’s my job to ensure they

get the best deal... (it’s) “really important that we pay people for their work... All these people out there who are trying to pitch their ideas, not knowing what will happen... We try to protect them.” (C4 News is unionised.) She helped introduce contracts whereby “people who work for us have to treat the people working for them properly.”

If “you’ve never worked in TV that doesn’t matter to us: a good story is a good story. Don’t spend loads of time” on developing ideas. (Pitches to [Dbyrne@Channel4.co.uk](mailto:Dbyrne@Channel4.co.uk))

If “people have a really good idea, we help and support them. When we get a pitch... I say, can I give your idea to C4 News, C4 would negotiate” to buy the story and on what your role would be. “If it gets bigger, I’ll give you names for at least two independent production companies for you to go and see.” Or she might put you in touch with another out-

let. “It might seem odd that I would help you sell your story to the BBC. But it’s in my interests to have many experienced people working in TV.”

Some “shocking stories” about nicking ideas have come Dorothy’s way. Freelances pitching an idea are told, “we’re already doing that” in a common broadcast scam, but “we are really strict about that at C4... If you think anybody stole an idea... you should definitely get on to me.”

Dorothy observed when she gives talks, female freelances say, that’s all very well, but in my little production company I knew my one-month contract wouldn’t get renewed unless I went to dinner with the man who ran the company. “The only way I find out is if freelances tell me. If you think that’s happening you should tell me directly.”

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• There’s a much longer report of this meeting online, with links.



Dorothy Byrne promises that Channel 4 will do its best by freelances. Photo: Hazel Dunlop

## Bad Bill! Down!

THE UK GOVERNMENT is attempting to force through the Trade Union Bill, which is very bad news indeed. Its provisions include a requirement that the “supervisor” of a picket give their name to the police. It would, if passed, compel trades unions to give several weeks’ notice of their intention to use social media in support of a strike. Even the quintessentially

but rebelliously Tory MP David Davis is concerned that some measures in the Bill are “draconian”. The *Free-lance* fears this is unfair to dragons.

Interviewed on Sky News on 13 September, Davis said: “I agree with most of the trade union bill. I think it’s very sensible ... but there are bits of it which look OTT, like requiring pickets to give their names to the

police force. What is this? This isn’t Franco’s Britain, this is Queen Elizabeth II’s Britain.” Francisco Franco was Fascist dictator of Spain from 1939 until his death in 1975.

Write to your MP now, sign the petition and watch for demos and actions you can take, at [www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.tuc.org.uk/get-involved) and [www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)

LFB meetings

9 November

Philip Beresford on the Rich List and other successes

14 December

Seasonal social

See back page & [www.twitter.com/NUJ\\_LFB](http://www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB)