

NUJ vote backs freelances

NINE DELEGATES from London Freelance Branch travelled to Southport in April for the NUJ's biennial Delegate Meeting (DM). This saw multiple motions that could affect freelance members passed.

Arguably the most significant for freelances active in the union was the debate around loss of earnings – an expenses payment to freelances for work undertaken for the NUJ. This saw the rate restored to £50 – delegates supported the plans by a comfortable margin. The motion was proposed by the Freelance Industrial Council (FIC), elected to represent freelances within the union. FIC noted “the need to enable and encourage activism among self-employed workers who have no regular wage”.

Loss of earnings have oscillated with the union's fortunes and the regard in which freelances are held by other members. They were last reduced from £50 to £35 due to the union's financial difficulties in 2012.

Other key motions passed included a change to the structure of subscription rates for members joining the union in future. These members' rates should be based on what they are paid. Current members, however, can continue to have their rates defined by what industrial sector they are in.

DM passed a motion from London Freelance Branch opposing the delayed new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point, Somerset. (See

www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1606nuke.html)

All nine LFB delegates spoke on conference floor, four of them for the first time, on topics such as freelance salons, the reporting of alleged events outside Stella Creasy MP's Walthamstow office, provision for journalism students with disabilities and the increased pressures on journalists entering the workforce.

Long-time LFB Chair Dave Rotchelle was one of four long-serving activists to be made a Member of Honour, the Union's highest honour. Presenting the award, Freelance Organiser John Toner said “Dave's devotion to the NUJ is unsurpassable and his dedication to any role or task that he undertakes has always been 100 per cent”.

Rotchelle, who was the Pleasers' drummer prior to becoming a photographer, said he was honoured to be on stage in a conference hall in which the Beatles had once played, accepting the award “with love from me to you”.

General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet has been re-elected for second five-year term unopposed. Tim Dawson, a former FIC Chair, became the NUJ's new President, and Sian Jones is now Vice-President, while several LFB members were elected to positions within the union. Hina Pandya was elected to the Professional Training Committee. Safiullah Tazib made it on to the Equality



Delegate Meeting selfie featuring three of London Freelance Branch's nine delegates. Left to right: Hina Pandya, Zaki Dogliani and Phil Sutcliffe. **Photo: © Hina Pandya**

Council. David Wilkins won election to the Disabled Members' Council. Pennie Quinton joined the TUC Delegation and National Executive and Magda Ibrahim was voted into the Women's TUC Delegation.

© **Zaki Dogliani**

Transcription software offer

A company that is developing a new “app” for transcribing audio to text wishes to invite NUJ members to take part in a focus group to test and give feedback on the software. Those accepted would of course get a free copy in return. Initially, please contact editor@londonfreelance.org with the subject line “Transcription software”.

Sing a song of solidarity

LONDON Freelance Branch member Tim Dawson became NUJ President at the Delegate Meeting in Southport. The Freelance is pleased to offer him this quasi-monthly platform.

Shortly before the Delegate Meeting, a piece of sheet music came to light as Headland House (NUJ HQ) was cleared for renovation. *The Song Of The NUJ*, published in 1932 was scored by composer Henri Caesari with words by then General Secretary Henry Richardson. Unplayed since the 1930s, the words and piano part were dispatched to musician Jeremy Bradford, whose recording won surprise approval of delegates.

Notwithstanding Richardson's qualities as an organiser, it is as well that he did not professionally trouble Tin Pan Alley. His anthem's second verse, though, is stirring and thought-provoking. Amidst general convoluted praise for the union come the words: “It's good for freelances, their value enhances”. It underlines that freelances have been

significant factor in British journalism and the NUJ since their inception. The NUJ has been delivering collective responses to to freelancers' wilfully individual issues for over a century. And this year, at a DM at which few controversial decisions were taken, there was an ambitious motion committing the union to building an alliance across the trades union movement to demand a new statutory framework that would allow collective bargaining on behalf of freelances, as well as working to persuade the International Labour Organisation to adopt a Convention on “atypical workers”.

Such goals will not be easily achieved, but when they are, they will allow the NUJ to push up rates in a way not possible since the 1990s.

On the evidence of the last attempt, perhaps a new *Song Of The NUJ* is best avoided? Apart from anything else, steadfastness is an overused lyrical trope. If rhyme and melody help you maintain focus, however, Rachel Platten's 2015 *Fight*

Song is a good starting point. “Like how a single word/Can make a heart open/I might only have one match/ But I can make an explosion”.

If we all manage just a little of that, then delegates' three days debating motions will have been well spent.

© **Tim Dawson**



• You can hear *The Song of the NUJ* linked from a longer version of this article at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1605prez.html

• A summit with feasting and suffering – Tim Dawson's report from the recent World Media Summit in Doha, Qatar, where he was an NUJ delegate, is at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1606prez.html

The Song of the NUJ
image © unknown; front cover image used under the exception for the purposes of review.