

De-recognition climb-down

PENGUIN Random House has one of the NUJ's oldest Chapels (workplace-based units of organisation), and it has had a recognition agreement in place since the early 1970s.

Union recognition means elected union reps negotiate with management on behalf of employees collectively, although this collective bargaining doesn't at the moment extend to freelances. Most such agreements date from "re-recognition" following the Fairness at Work Act of the early 2000s.

Suddenly, late last year, the publishing company's management de-

cided it wanted to de-recognise the Union and tear up the recognition agreement it had with the NUJ.

What was at the time a small Chapel without that many members fought back, and the fight also turned into what one NUJ activist described as a "fantastic recruitment drive." Well-known authors who are published by Penguin pitched in – Owen Jones wrote to Penguin's management and former Greek finance minister and Penguin author Yanis Varoufakis also made his views known. Many writers represented by the Society of Authors (SoA) ex-

pressed their displeasure, as did the SoA's magazine *The Author*.

The *Freelance* understands that, as a result, Penguin Random House management had second thoughts and the de-recognition threat is now dropped. The NUJ Chapel is now a lot bigger as a result.

Some NUJ freelances are also members of the Society of Authors. A group of these, organised by the Adam Christie of the NUJ's Freelance Industrial Council, has written to the SoA to thank them for their cross-union solidarity.

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It was party time

MANY freelance journalists get no invitations to any of the office Christmas parties of the many organisations for which they work – that's if those in control of the guest lists are aware of their existence at all. Some freelances face isolation at work, enjoying no contact with their colleagues beyond emails and (if they're lucky) the odd phone call. All the more reason for London Freelance Branch to put on a seasonal celebration of its own.

LFB's Yule fest this year was in the generously-proportioned hall of the London Welsh Centre, just down the road from the NUJ's national offices at Headland House. (A refurbished Headland House has since re-opened, see page 6.)

Invitations were extended to other NUJ London Branches, to

members' colleagues, friends and partners. We were joined by NUJ members from London Central, from New Media and London Photographers' Branches.

There was also a contingent from the *Giornalisti Italiani a Londra* (Italian Journalists in London) group, in which LFB members are active.

New arrivals were issued with their raffle ticket entitling them to their first drink at the bar on the house, with a generous spread of food laid out. Rik's Sound System provides ska sounds.

LFB would like to thank the London Welsh Centre's Mirain Roberts and her staff for helping to make our party such a success – in the words of our Treasurer, "all incredibly helpful, way beyond what we could have expected." There was the briefest of



Partygoers at LFB's Christmas bash

Photo: © Hazel Dunlop

interruptions to present outgoing Branch Chair Fiona O'Cleirigh with a gift in recognition of the hard work she's put in over the past years.

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Journalists charged for covering a riot in US

AS WE went to press, at least three freelance or "independent" journalists arrested covering the Washington DC protests at the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January were facing sentences of up to ten years after being arrested and charged with "felony rioting".

The journalists were among seven reporters arrested and charged during "J20", anti-Trump protests on January 20, despite showing their accreditation. One had his camera seized by police.

Four of the journalists arrested at the same event have since had charges dropped. Several NUJ freelances covered the events (avoiding arrest), see for example Jason N. Parkinson's footage at <https://phnat.org>. Journalists were targeted by police with shock grenades and CS gas spray. An eyewitness reported a member of the press being struck in the neck by a rubber bullet.

The US National Lawyers Guild

has claimed that the use of tear gas by DC police during the protest was illegal, with protesters "indiscriminately targeted because of their location." The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), of which the NUJ is part, has condemned the charges as "unacceptable in a democracy."

Some of those arrested were charged several days after events during which well over 200 people in total were arrested. Scott C Rodd, a DC-based freelance journalist, has appealed for any information on possible "other journalists known to have been arrested and charged while covering the Inauguration Day protests", so there could be more charges against journalists to come.

There's a petition calling on US District Attorney for the District of Columbia Channing D. Phillips and his spokesman William Miller to drop the charges against reporter Aaron Cantu and photographers

Shay Horse and Alexander Stokes Contompasis (146,000 signatures at the time of writing). Please sign it and circulate it, it's at www.change.org/p/u-s-attorney-channing-d-phillips-drop-felony-charges-against-journalists-who-covered-inauguration-day-protests

An expanding list

It's not surprising, given the above and more, that news agency Reuters issued reporting guidance that all-but declared the US to be a hazardous environment for journalists.

Of course the situation in Turkey remains dire. The International Federation of Journalists keeps protesting. And NUJ President and *Freelance* columnist Tim Dawson describes strange encounters in the Houses of Parliament as part of the NUJ's efforts in support of the media workers – at least 29 – jailed in Egypt. See www.londonfreelance.org/fil/1612prez.html

Insurance for journalists

THE International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), of which the NUJ is a part, now offers insurance for journalists working in hazardous areas. It covers the usual situations that conventional insurers don't like – war, rebellion, civil war or terrorism. It'll get you home and provide you (or your survivors) with up to \$100,000 for accidental death or disablement. The cover is from 1-4 weeks and the premium depends on the "zone" you're working in. The zone of highest risk – a list similar to countries covered by Trump's travel ban, plus some Russian regions, will set you back around \$60 a week; "lowest risk" places currently including the US and UK start at \$12. Admin fees, terms and conditions and the rest come on top. The *Freelance* is not licensed to provide financial advice, but it looks like as good a deal as you'll get. It's open to members with an IFJ International Press Card – see page 2 and www.insuranceforjournalists.com/ifj