The Freelance Office – vale John Toner

AFTER over 16 years fighting on behalf of freelances as the NUJ’s Freelance Officer and then its Senior Freelance Officer, John Toner moves to the NUJ’s Glasgow Office where he takes up the post of NUJ’s Scottish Organiser. As part of his new role, John – who has been a familiar face at LFB meetings – will continue to work on behalf of NUJ freelances in Scotland.

The Freelance thanks John for all his hard work for the Union’s freelances over the years. Coverage of rousing speeches by John at LFB’s own event on precarious work – as well as “Unpaid work… the curse of the freelance classes” from the 2014 NUJ Delegate Meeting – are linked from the online version of this article at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1803jt.html

Freelances with enquiries or in need of support from the union should contact Freelance Organiser (and Wales Organiser) Pamela Morton at the Freelance Office on 020 7843 3703 or email her at freelan ceoffice@nuj.org.uk – Pamela

John Toner at the March 2017 London Freelance Branch precarious working conference: see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1704prec.html

Photo © Matt Salusbury

also attends LFB meetings to deal with members’ queries. To contact NUJ officials, see www.londonfreelance.org/nujone.html

Gig economy companies ‘game the system’

COMPANIES with “gig economy” operations are trying to “game the system” to avoid their workers getting rights, says those workers’ trade union representative. Shortly before the publication of the Framework for Modern Employment report recommending strengthened right for all workers (see page 2), they won a victory, which the Freelance hopes will be temporary. A surprise judgement ruled that Deliveroo riders organised by the Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain did not have collective bargaining rights as they were “self-employed”.

The ruling came from the Central Arbitration Committee, set up by the Thatcher government in 1975 to, er, “regulate” trades union matters and disputes or, as it says, to “encourage fair and efficient arrangements in the workplace by resolving collective disputes in England, Scotland and Wales”.

The hearing followed Deliveroo issuing new contracts saying that its riders could send a substitute in their place: this is one of the tests of whether a “worker” is self-employed or not. IWGB General Secretary Jason Moyer-Lee said: “a so-called gig economy company has found a way to game the system.”

© Matt Salusbury

Express way to join the Mirror

TRINITY MIRROR announced in February that it had bought the Express, Sunday Express and Ok! magazine from Richard Desmond’s Northern & Shell, along with its stake in the Irish Daily Star.

The deal, worth £126.7 million, will result in “savings” of over £20 million over the next two years. Trinity Mirror chief executive Simon Fox told Radio 4’s Today that these savings would be made largely through cuts to the back office.

As we went to press the deal was still subject to approval by the Competition and Markets Authority on “media plurality grounds” and also required approval by Trinity Mirror shareholders.

A spokesman for the Express Newspapers NUJ Chapel said that the “brilliant journalists” at the Express and Sunday Express had for years been “starved of investment.” They recently won a pay rise after many years without.

Soon after the announcement of the sale, Trinity Mirror announced a further 49 redundancies across its local newspapers nationwide.

#useitpayforit because images are worth it

The NUJ has run a month-long campaign to meet the “need to raise the awareness of the issue with amateur photographers and videographers who, by giving their work away for nothing, are undermining professional photographers and the worth of good photographs and videos”. There’s no reason to stop Tweeting; see www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/useitpayforit and www.twitter.com/useitpayforit.

Crackdown on intern exploitation

Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC, the tax people) announced a crackdown on unpaid interns in February, with “media” expected to be one of the sectors it would be targeting. As of early February HMRC had already sent 550 letters to businesses warning them that many unpaid internships break the Minimum Wage Act, under which anyone whose role meets the definition of a “worker” must be paid at least the minimum wage. There was also the promise of HMRC “enforcement teams” to tackle repeat offenders over internships.

Former interns can claim the minimum wage via an Industrial Tribunal for their hours worked up to six months after their internship finished. The NUJ won such a case as part of its Cashback for Interns campaign back in 2011: see www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/cashback-for-interns and members who believe their internship is or was illegal email legal@nuj.org.uk

See the old-skool Branch interns campaign page at www.londonfreelance.org/interns

National Insurance deadline looms

National insurance – your payments to the government that qualify you for a state pension and certain benefits – is changing with the abolition of “Class 2” contributions from 6 April. That may leave you with more in your pocket now. But some freelances would do well in the long run to pay “top-up” contributions before then. We hope to have basic advice online at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1803ni.html – but recommend getting independent advice on your particular situation now.