

Book Branch News

NUJ Book Branch

www.nujbook.org

December 2007

Diary dates

Tue 8 Jan, 18.30–20.30

Book Branch meeting, Headland House. Members are entitled to expenses for extra public transport costs and any childcare costs related to attending these meetings.

Tue 5 Feb, 18.30–20.30

Book Branch meeting, Headland House.

1 Feb 08

Close of ADM amendments and close of nominations for delegates.

22 Jan 08

Training: Negotiating skills stage 3, London.

24 Jan 08

Training: NUJ officer's course stage 1, London.

21 Feb 08

Training: Representing members stage 2, London.

29 Feb 08

Training: Getting started as a freelance, London.

Book Branch News

December edition edited by Emma Wood

Please send news for the next issue of BBN by 10 Dec to editor@nujbook.org

Integration of freelance and staff organisation at chapel level – motions passed by branch

Emma Wood

It has been obvious for a very long time in book publishing that our bargaining power is undermined by the employers' freedom to exploit freelance labour. At least since the eighties the use of freelance has been integral to planning in more and more book publishing houses. Often freelance is a euphemism for casualised worker.

It is easy to see why the conglomerates now dominating publishing adopt the policy; it is not so easy to see why we allow them to get away with it. It is now almost a decade since the first stage of restoring our right to collective bargaining was introduced by the Labour government which helped to re-establish recognition at some major houses. There remains much more to do.

The present situation acts against us all whether staff or freelance: quite apart from the obvious cost in pay, there is an insidious divisive quality of relationships imposed upon us by this policy which frames the working lives of so many editors.

Book Branch has voted to open up this issue for campaigning and agreed to the following.

- All members are invited to email the branch co-chairs on the subject of how best to integrate freelance people into the chapels.
- We will be co-ordinating ourselves with London Freelance Branch too. We have to make it difficult for book publishers to continue with their current practices which are costing us too much and allowing the

quality of book publishing in Britain to decline at the same time.

It has long been considered desirable that each chapel should have a committee member responsible for encouraging freelance people to participate and also integrating them as much as possible. We are under no illusions, there is no swift solution. Come to branch meetings when you can and discuss the implementation of this new vital campaign.

The branch motion, passed on 2 October, says:

In view of the importance of freelancers to book publishing houses, Book Branch agrees to campaign for better integration of freelancers and chapels. To this end:

- (i) the Book Branch committee will arrange a joint consultative meeting with representatives of London Freelance Branch on the subject of increasing effective representation of freelance workers in book publishing via their chapels;
- (ii) Book Branch committee chapel liaison representatives will contact chapels specifically on this subject and report to November branch meeting;
- (iii) the branch chairs will issue a special email to all chapel reps inviting them to an email discussion on ways of involving freelancers in their chapels, and will report to the branch on this discussion;
- (iv) after this preparatory work is completed the branch committee will produce a leaflet for distribution during

active campaigning.

In further discussion about freelance work, the following ADM motion was passed at the 6 November branch meeting.

ADM notes with concern the frequency with which employees are being made redundant and then asked to work freelance often on the same project. The practice of casualising the workforce in book publishing is damaging the quality of life of those who work in the industry; it is so widespread that the quality of editing and research in the production of books is also threatened.

Legislation exists to protect workers in cases of redundancy, but it is clear from the amount of casework of this type currently being undertaken that there is a system in operation of using redundancy as a cover for casualisation.

ADM therefore instructs the general secretary to arrange for talks to be opened with MPs and those who influence government to strengthen employees' protection and rights in redundancy situations.

Reminder

The January branch meeting is on the second, not the first, Tuesday. Please note this in your diary.

8 January 2008, 18.30, Headland House, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1. Nearest tube, Kings Cross.

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Andy Smith (south-east)

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Sylvia Kwan
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Book Branch website
www.nujbook.org

Freelance rates online
www.nujbook.org/freeln01.html

NUJ freelance directory and rate for the job
www.londonfreelance.org.uk

NUJ head office
www.nuj.org.uk
020 7278 7916

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Free speech threat over critical book on Israel

David Castle, commissioning editor, Pluto Press

A controversy in the United States over a new book from a British publisher has raised questions about the ability of foreign presses to distribute politically challenging books in the USA.

Progressive publisher Pluto Press has been attacked by a pro-Israel lobby group, Stand With Us (SWU), who claim that Pluto is publishing 'anti-American and anti-Israeli propaganda'. In particular, SWU have targeted a new book by Bard College Professor Joel Kovel, *Overcoming Zionism: Creating a Single Democratic State in Israel/Palestine (OZ)*, which it says is 'a polemic against Israel' and 'laced with contempt for Judaism'.

Pluto Press is distributed in the United States by the University of Michigan Press (UMP), and SWU have claimed that Kovel's book, and much of Pluto's list, is of no scholarly merit and therefore unsuitable for distribution by an academic press. SWU and numerous supporters have been pressurising the university to cease their relationship with Pluto, and for a brief period UMP suspended distribution of *OZ*. UMP are currently re-examining their relationship with Pluto in the wake of SWU's attack.

Pluto vehemently refutes the accusations made by Stand With Us. Pluto publishes from within many traditions of radical scholarship - Marxist, anarchist, feminist, green, and others - which while often marginalised within the universities, represent vital, critical strands of academic debate. Their loss might placate some on the political right but it would certainly narrow the terms of academic discourse and weaken intellectual endeavour as a whole. Many prestigious scholars have published with Pluto: Joel Kovel himself is a widely respected radical thinker, author of a classic text of eco-Marxism, *The Enemy of Nature*, and editor-in-chief of

the eminent journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*.

Overcoming Zionism itself is certainly partisan in the sense that it argues that the present Zionist Israeli state is illegitimate and should be replaced by a new, secular democratic state for both Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Kovel argues his case through a well-documented critique of the history of Zionism and the modern Israeli state. Of course, many will disagree with Kovel's conclusions. The question is, is *THE BOOK* unscholarly? Kovel argues forcefully for a particular point, and takes a stance in a political conflict - should this be out of bounds for academic writing? The fact is that many academic texts argue unreservedly for certain principles - the benefits of the free market (in Economics), or for flexible working practices (in Management) or for international law based on principles of human rights (in Law). But within today's political climate, these principles are so widely accepted as to be utterly uncontentious. Kovel's sin is to argue for something that is not only unpopular, but regarded by many as beyond acceptable discourse.

The reason that Kovel's argument is so controversial is not for any scholarly reason - the reason is purely political. The pro-Israel lobby in the United States is an extremely powerful force in US politics - highly organised, very well funded, with influence in the heart of government - and through persuasion, chastisement and not a little bullying, the lobby has managed to establish in many people's minds that criticism of Israel and Zionism is no less than anti-Semitism - that is to say, that criticism of the actions of a state and a political ideology is equivalent to an attack and denigration of a whole people. It is a dangerous line of argument, because if extended to any state and

people it would mean that criticism of any state other than one's own should be considered a racist attack. Indeed, in the case of Israel, being Jewish does not seem to give you any more right to be critical of the state that claims to be your homeland, as Kovel himself has found out.

The controversy surrounding *Overcoming Zionism* is only one example of what happens when an academic crosses the line of acceptable discourse set by the Israeli lobby. Campus Watch, another lobby organisation, is in the business of identifying scholars who are critical of Israel and attempting to discredit them. It is widely accepted that Norman Finkelstein, author of *The Holocaust Industry*, lost his permanent position at De Paul University as a result of pressure from the lobby. There is currently a similar dispute over tenure for Nadia Abu El-Haj, an anthropologist at Barnard College, Columbia University, who has written a book about the way archaeology is deployed to support political ends - specifically, to demonstrate the veracity of Israel's supposed origins in a Biblical past, a claim at the heart of Zionism.

The situation poses serious questions for publishers. Pluto prides itself on being able to publish critical and often controversial books on all manner of topics. But it seems that in the United States there is one topic at least where one cannot publish freely, and certainly if one attempts to make an unreservedly critical intervention on Israel, one can anticipate attempts to both cease the distribution of the book and to slur the name of the publisher. One might expect this in a dictatorship but hope for better in a state that regards itself as a global champion of democracy.

First alert to possible big changes in the union

Mitzi Bales reports on possible structures for the union

The union is starting an in-depth investigation of its internal structure to 'ensure that they reflect our membership and that there is true democratic engagement for every member and sector.'

To this end, branches are being asked to discuss our structures and make suggestions for improvements or changes. This is your introduction to the issue, the first discussion of which will take place at the December branch meeting.

Structure may seem a dull subject, but it is the basis of union efficiency as well as democracy. The NUJ has been restructured several times in its 100 year history. Those leading the union now feel that the enormous changes in the world of work call for an examination of whether our union structures are meeting

the challenges.

The union's development committee has established a small subcommittee to examine the issues brought before it. The subcommittee says: 'We are asking every branch, chapel, industrial sector and individual members to tell us how they believe the union's democratic structure could be improved...Please put this debate on the agenda for a forthcoming branch or chapel meeting and then let us know what you think.'

The subcommittee will begin collating responses early next year in order to bring a discussion paper to the ADM in Belfast in April. Consultations will continue during 2008 and final proposals will be presented to ADM 2009.

Here are some of the questions already being debated:

- Are members in books and PR best serviced by branch structures as a full, equal part of the union?
- How do we encourage our members to become active?
- Are freelance members well serviced by the current structures? (Book branch has a sizeable freelance membership.)
- Are branches still the best way to conduct union business. If not, what should replace them?
- Do industrial councils have a role to play?

BBN will be the branch forum for this debate. So watch for further articles, send in your comments, and come to branch meetings. Let's have our say on this important internal issue. The outcome will affect all of us.

Chapel news

Penguin DK

The latest news is that the chapel and HR are discussing the merit award system and how to improve it.

LexisNexis

There is now a health and safety rep at the Croydon office which means there is now one at each site.

General

At the November branch meeting, the national organiser gave a detailed account of recent developments in various publishing houses, including some in Oxford. She highlighted the email network by which all chapels are able to discuss their immediate detailed needs for information about agreements, and so on.

New leaflets

Chapels have received book publishing-specific leaflets prepared in conjunction with our President Michelle Stanistreet. Penguin DK has given a thumbs-up on them and is planning for their use.

Stand up for journalism

Two Book Branch events on the launch of the Stand Up for Journalism campaign on 5 November were reported.

LexisNexis chapel organised a Breakfast in the Boardroom at a suitable breakfast hour, which was attended by a large number of members and nonmembers. The posters that had announced this NUJ day of action caused some jumpiness in management (given the chapel's recent edge towards strike action), but their fears were calmed with the offering of muffins from the breakfast table. Several new members signed up at the enjoyable event.

Going west from Chancery Lane to Sussex Gardens, membership secretary Mitzi Bales welcomed members to her home for 'picket-line banana cake' (which she had taken to every Book Branch picket line in the past) and old union songs on CDs by Woody Guthrie, The Almanac Singers

and The Weavers. Everyone especially relished the spirited words and music of The Union Maid.

The evening event at the Holiday Inn near national headquarters drew a large crowd, many of whom were attending their first union activity. Food, drink, chat and a jazz band livened the evening after excellent speakers held the floor. They included our own branch co-chair, Annie Pike, along with our general secretary, our president and such notables as Tony Benn and John McDonnell.

Recent publications

Labour Research Department's latest magazine warns: 'Getting caught in a long-term pay agreement without an inflation link can be costly' and features news from Europe, asylum seekers and the right to work, Facebook, and more. Contact 020 7928 3649 to find out about LRD publications for trade unionists.

The *Charter of Freelance Rights* is published by the **European Federation of Journalists** and supported by the International Federation of Journalists. The NUJ is affiliated to both these bodies. For your copies contact Headland House switchboard 020 7278 7916.

The *Charter of Freelance Rights* raises issues. The text should spark some discussions of freelance issues that can be published over the next few months in BBN. Please contribute your ideas.

Films of interest from the Socialist Film Co-op

The current season of films includes:

Salt of the Earth (1954), 9 December.

Tambogrande, Mangos, Murder, Mining (2006) followed by discussion with Jeremy Corbyn MP, 13 January 2008.

The Wind that Shakes the Barley (2006), Ken Loach, 10 February 2008.

Venue: Renoir, Brunswick Square, London WC1, Sunday mornings at 11 am.

For further information: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com or 020 7278 5764

Did you know?

Learning and skills contacts

Department for Education and Skills: www.dfes.gov.uk

Adult Guidance Policy Team: www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/ia9

Learning and Skills Council: tel 08450 194170

Learndirect: www.learndirect.co.uk

Learndirect learn through work: www.learndirect-ltw.co.uk

Sector Skills Development Agency: www.skillsforbusiness.org.uk

(Source: *Learning and skills – a trade unionist's guide*, LRD)

Book Branch represented at founding conference of National Shop Stewards' Network

Sheila Cohen

Sheila Cohen is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre in Employment Studies, University of Hertfordshire. She is a joint member of the Union of Colleges and Universities (UCU) and the NUJ Book Branch. She is the author of Ramparts of Resistance (Pluto 2006), an analysis of trade union struggles in the UK and USA 1968--74, and writes about rank-and-file trade unionism as an activist.

The National Shop Stewards' Network (NSSN) held its founding conference in July 2007, with about 290 activists in attendance. Chair Rob Williams, convenor of the Visteon car parts factory in Swansea, emphasised the importance of shop stewards or other workplace reps to recruitment and organisation. As he put it, pressure from the shop floor [workplace] is the thing that will take the rank and file movement forward.

The morning session comprised contributions from a variety of unions, reflecting on both victories and defeats in struggles for workers.

The afternoon was taken up with workshops, the one I attended being Organising in the Workplace. First came analysis and criticism of current union practice, then proposals for action from the grass roots. Workplace meetings and direct membership involvement were key features of the discussion on effective organising. One speaker raised the need for a middle layer of active members as well as reps. This was enlarged upon by another delegate who said: 'When members are asked to do something small, like distributing leaflets on their

floor, it's the beginning of bigger involvement. You can get a wider layer of active members...it gives you a bigger pool to draw from.'

Here are some of the other cogent comments:

- '[I have] become a "quasi-lawyer" through being forced to use legislation'
- 'as a weapon to defend members; but workplace meetings are essential'
- 'we need face to face contact'
- 'the only way to get members to meetings is to make it easy'
- 'local action is what's important...Trades Councils and workplace meetings -- that's what works'.

The best way to win an unorganised workplace is to gain victories. The NSSN should aim to get victories out there.

The last session heard more speakers in top leadership positions, which raised a question as to whether the conference had achieved its aim of renewing strength and confidence at the roots of the movement. The consensus was that the conference made a major step in this direction.

Conference passed a positive resolution of which point five says: 'Organise at regional level conferences of shop stewards and workplace representatives to build regional shop steward networks, and to mobilise the local unions in support of those in struggle.' And 32 active trade unionists volunteered to serve on a Steering Committee to bring this resolution into being.

November branch meeting report

ADM motions

The branch has three:

- One on strengthening employees' rights and protection in situation where freelance is being used as a means of casualising the workforce and redundancy is claimed by employers.
- The second is on the present situation in Pakistan offering support to the trade union movement there.
- The third reaffirms our support for Cuba and welcomes a recent United Nations decision which condemns the illegal US blockade and presses the British and Irish governments to enhance positive bilateral relations with Cuba.

The full texts along with all motions will come back to the branch for further discussion and amendment in Jan 08 and the preliminary ADM agenda in which all these are printed will be obtainable from headland house from 14 Dec 07.

Ongoing matters

Matters which will continue to

occupy the branch for the foreseeable future are the non-appearance of the pamphlet and the strategy document.

Cuba si

Those present were pleased to greet Helmedo Perez Rubido, head of the European section of the Cuban Institute for Friendship among the Peoples. He told of Cuba developing ecologically sound industrial practices involving bio-fuels and solar power. The difficult 'special period' in the Cuban economy resulting from the loss of 85 per cent of its trade, which had been with the socialist bloc is over and Cuba has survived it. The importance of solidarity in the face of the US blockade was emphasised. We hoped our visitor had found the meeting interesting.

Membership

Seven applications from new members were accepted. Unfortunately the correspondence file brought us news of two resignations from the union, one of which is from our branch, over the Drogheda agreement on new technology and the subsequently reported 'dialogue' of union officials regarding photographers. (Drogheda story reported in the November issue of the Journalist).

Attention all designers

Can you help?

The branch needs a volunteer to design the *Book Branch News*, prepare it for production and see it through to printing. All the textual material is supplied and proofreading is arranged by the editor. There are five or six issues a year, usually on a bimonthly basis. This role can be taken on as a job share.

We know there are many talented designers and production members in the branch, so please, one (or two) of you come forward for this important contribution to the working of the branch. The layout is done with easy-to-use software such as Word or StarOffice/OpenOffice.

Contact: editor@nujbook.org