

I do not want to focus in detail on all the Drogheda Independent House Agreement as it is for the local members, the NUJ and the Drogheda Independent. I know it contains many fine points apart from the few contentious clauses currently causing much debate.

I hope others, more qualified, will seek to address the valid concerns relating to copyright, new media and future technology but I would like to make a number of overall observations that relate to press photographers, the NUJ and the modern workplace.

- Press Photographers have had to adapt many work practise changes over the past 10 years with and without the assistance of the NUJ.
- I, for one, am not adverse to negotiated work changes and believe the majority of my colleagues feel the same.

It is clear, however, upon reading this agreement that no real consideration has been given to photographers. No amount of post rationalisation will disguise that fact. This agreement has been made public to members only after a vigorous campaign from some members - yet the NUJ continue to stifle open debate paying it mere lip service.

They have also tried to limit the boundary of the debate saying it is "an Irish" matter. This is an unfair tactic and attempts to limit who photographers can approach and limit the scale of any proper consultation. This agreement will have far reaching implications and I would welcome the opinions of steering groups in the Union - groups like the FIC and the Photo Sub Committee.

Some have tried to dismiss any argument against the offending clause, as they relate to photographers, by stating that it only seeks to ratify what is commonplace in other newspaper groups. I would like to point out that while it may be the practise in some groups for journalists to carry a camera it is not yet an NUJ agreed practice. The fact that it is common practice is not the fault of photographers alone - perhaps NUJ officers and members who condone such practices should consider this more carefully and examine how their lack of action in the past might have led to where we are now. The union are right - they cannot turn a blind eye to the practises that have developed but they shouldn't turn their back on members simply to get a quick deal through. The working party only have to take cognisance of NUJ policy - they are not required to adhere to it!

I have also heard it mentioned that the publisher cannot get photographers to cover markings. What we are not told about is the low fee rate involved. This speaks volumes about the NUJ's current attitude to photographers - instead of negotiating a decent shift rate (trust me there is no shortage of NUJ photographers looking for work - but not at any price) it seeks to lump the extra work onto the reporter. In a new tactic they seek to describe the

freelancers in Drogheda as “companies” - the implication being that they are large, successful companies undertaking large amounts of commercial work and employing bands of photographers. Whatever way photographers organise their business shouldn't deflect us from the shocking manner in which photographers have been, and continue to be, treated by certain publishers. It is a fact that the reason I turned down a contract job with a regional paper, related to this group, 5 years ago was because the pay scale was so shockingly low.

One supporter of the agreement wrote about the power of a good press photograph and then went on to say “that technological advances have made it possible for anyone to take a picture that is printable.” At this point we should also remember the words of Harold Evans who said “*Photographs are more than mere decoration, flying geese on the grey wall of text.*” It is good to hear that supporters of the agreement value good press photographers but obviously not enough to defend their right to a decent rate for the job.

Irish photographers are looking to the Irish Executive Council to represent their interests too. Everyone understands that this is a difficult time. The agreement is for the most part of huge benefit to the chapel, the increases that have been agreed bringing the chapel back in line with other journalists in Ireland. A few, very small, changes will make the difference between this being seen by so many members as a betrayal and the huge success and achievement that it should so right fully be.

Endorsing Point 6.1 of the DI House Agreement would be:

- Failing to recognise truly what a “press photographer” is.
- Failing to recognise the true skill set of a press photographer
- Failing to see the positive and real role good press photography has to play in Regional press.
- Helping to bring down the overall standard of all journalism - both the image and the word.
- Clearly indicating their lack of commitment to all press photographers - freelance and staffer in every region the NUJ serves! The Union is cherry picking which members they will fight for and who they will ignore - We are all equal - but some more than others.
- Removing the ability of Freelancers to negotiate a fair deal for themselves - if they withdraw their services, the reporter will do it for the company.

I am not against the photojournalist who has learnt the skills of these two disciplines- they have existed since the photographic medium began - I am not against “citizen journalism - for years members of the public have submitted images that add to the journalistic function - but we might do well to remember the words of Stefan Lorant who said, “*The camera should be like*

*the notebook of a trained journalist*". Photographers realise that simply giving a notebook to a photographer will not make him a reporter - nor will it lead to cost savings, improved standards or better journalism - we can only hope that reporters, the IEC and the NUJ will realise that the reverse is also true. Only then can we honestly set about trying to convince the publishers!

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