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The NVJPhoto email list has no connection whatsoever with the National Union of Journalists, is in no way sanctioned by the NUJ, is not endorsed by the NUJ, is not funded by the NUJ. In fact the NUJ would certainly prefer it did not exist at all.

Photographers are often isolated by the nature of their work, and share a common interest, which sets them aside from most NUJ colleagues. The purpose of this unofficial NVJPhoto list is to maintain lines of communication between visual journalists and photographers who wish to informally discuss industry and NUJ issues, but who are no longer able to do so since closure of the NUJPhoto listserv.

Membership is open to whomsoever the list moderators wish to admit. In practical terms this will mean most of the membership of the now-closed NUJPhoto list are eligible. In general terms this will mean professional photographers who are current NUJ members. For more details see the membership guidelines.

What became of the NUJPhoto list? (short version)

The old NUJPhoto list was voluntarily and unilaterally suspended by its owner, Pete Jenkins, on 1 August 2007. This followed discussion of the proposed Drogheda NUJ agreement which included a clause approving the use of cameras by writers, in exchange for a wage increase and closed shop. This affected a number of list members directly; yet none had never been consulted. Many more criticised the agreement and the lack of consultation. A number of list members wrote to the Irish Secretary Seamus Dooley, who had been one of the main negotiators, and also other NUJ officials. Dooley thus became aware of considerable opposition to the agreement he had brokered, emanating from NUJPhoto. The Irish Executive Council subsequently voted to reject the agreement and referred it to the NEC. Dooley demanded to be admitted to the NUJPhoto list, and was refused, partly because he was not a photographer and did not qualify, and partly because majority of list members who had expressed an opinion did not want Dooley on the list.

The list closure was intended to be temporary and was precipitated by irreconcilable differences between NUJ management, who insisted on the admission of Seamus Dooley, and the list owner, who was not prepared to admit him against the wishes of list members. Pete Jenkins felt the Emergency Committee would have to take their consideration

of the Drogheda agreement on merit, with the list no longer posing a 'threat'. He concedes this was a mistake; it made no difference at all and the EC approved the Drogheda agreement.

It also made no difference to the EC's verdict regarding NUJPhoto. Since then, the NUJ has made it clear that it forbids the recommencement of NUJPhoto, or of any substitute forum claiming any endorsement or official NUJ status. Hence this entirely independent and unofficial NVJPhoto list has now been formed.

What became of the NUJPhoto list (long and bloody version).

Much of this story has already been very adequately covered at the Editorial Photographers UK site, and anyone who needs to know the background is advised to look to EPUK's coverage:

NUJ photographers oppose Drogheda proposals
<http://www.epuk.org/News/639/fury-at-nuj-drogheda-agreement>

NUJPhoto list closes after pressure from NUJ
<http://www.epuk.org/News/644/nuj-caught-in-nujphoto-power-struggle>

NUJ Emergency NEC meeting endorses Drogheda deal
<http://www.epuk.org/News/647/drogheda-independent-agreement-endorsed-by-nuj>

The NUJ EC statement approving the Drogheda deal
<http://www.epuk.org/News/650/the-nujs-statement-in-full>

Why Pete Jenkins closed the NUJphoto list
<http://www.epuk.org/News/652/jenkins-why-i-closed-down-the-nujphoto-list>

Some further coverage may be found at Roy Greenslade's blog
http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/greenslade/2007/07/nuj_storm_as_photographers_los.html

The draft NUJ Drogheda agreement
<http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?docid=1815>

The following is a more detailed explanation which we feel NUJ members are entitled to be made aware of. It contains some private correspondence reproduced without permission. Unfortunately this is essential in order to present a clear account of events and we believe publication is in the public interest.

Background

The original NUJPhoto list was established by Pete Jenkins in 2004, initially as an informal and unofficial mechanism to improve communications between NUJ photographers, both staff and freelance, and with the aim of improving communications between NUJ members and officials. The mailing list was not set up to be a 'virtual chapel', but a virtual coffee shop (without the coffee).

Pete Jenkins purchased the nujphoto.co.uk domain, and with assistance from many people the list commenced operation with typical mailing list rules regarding membership eligibility, conduct, confidentiality and liability of authors for their own posts. As is usual, these rules were designed to facilitate the safe and effective operation of the list. Moderators were appointed by list members.

In 2005, Pete Jenkins approached the FIC and secured approval that the list become an 'official' NUJ venue in exchange for partial funding to secure list operation. This was later ratified by the NEC, of which Pete Jenkins is a member. The Union made no demands beyond stipulating that the list be run in a proper manner, free of abuse, which it already was.

By July 2007, list membership exceeded 200, it was strong and vibrant and a positive contributor to union culture by virtue of allowing members to participate.

On 6th July Pete Jenkins posted a report of the NEC meeting he had just attended, which included half a dozen lines, (out of about 300), about the Drogheda agreement, the first that anyone within NUJPhoto had heard of it.

This generated a debate involving Irish freelances and the photographer currently contracted to the Drogheda Independent, Sinead Sarsfield, whom it appears had been deliberately excluded from all previous knowledge of any agreement. As a result, a number of emails were sent by individual members to Seamus Dooley, registering objections and comments, which he had asked for.

On 11th July Dooley reported to the Irish Executive Council that he had received a large number of emails expressing concern, and the IEC decided to defer their decision for a fortnight to give time for wider consultation.

On 20th July Dooley requested membership of the NUJPhoto list from the moderators.

"If issues are to be discussed in relation to Ireland I should be a member."

This request was put to the list membership. A 10:1 majority of those who expressed an opinion were against the idea, and Dooley was refused.

On 27th July the Irish Executive Council voted down the draft Drogheda agreement 8 votes to seven, and referred it to the NEC with a recommendation to reject, & to recommend no reporters use cameras.

On 27th July Pete Jenkins received the following forwarded email from Jeremy Dear, General Secretary of the NUJ. Email addresses have been redacted for privacy.

From: Jeremy Dear [-----]
Sent: Friday, July 27, 2007 4:12 PM
To: [Tim](#) Dawson -----
Cc: -----
Subject: NUJPhoto

Dear Tim

I am writing to you as chair of the Freelance Industrial Council in respect of the issues raised in the email below. I have also been asked by Seamus Dooley to refer this matter to the NEC. Since it is likely the NEC Emergency Committee will meet next week it is probable they will discuss it then.

As I will be away any response should be copied to John Fray and/or Michelle Stanistreet.

It is simply unacceptable for a member to bar another member in good standing from being part of an official NUJ discussion group.

It is also unacceptable for a member to prevent another member from being able to access and respond to derogatory comments being written about them.

It is also unacceptable for someone to seek to censor the views of another member in good standing

It is also unacceptable that someone given a position of responsibility by the union should seek to use a union-financed facility which is there for all members to pursue a personal agenda against another member in good standing

It does not matter whether that member is an official or not - this is an abuse of authority and an abuse of union facilities. The FIC may like to consider in light of this whether the current moderator is a fit and proper person to serve in such an important role.

Unless FIC acts to resolve this problem I will recommend the NEC acts to

rectify the situation.

I hope you will use your good offices to avoid the need for such action by the NEC.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Dear
General Secretary

Dear's letter made an array of allegations without providing any chance to answer them; they were presented as assertions of unquestionable guilt. Tim Dawson was not asked to investigate whether there was any truth to them, he was asked to 'resolve the problem' like some sort of NUJ Luca Brasi. The clear implication is that Dear wanted Pete Jenkins removed from control of the list that he owned.

To examine Dear's assertions and provide some responses which he appears uninterested in hearing:

"It is simply unacceptable for a member to bar another member in good standing from being part of an official NUJ discussion group".

Barring Dooley was within the rules of the list, which had been in force from the lists inception in 2004 as an initially independent service. When the FIC and NEC subsequently endorsed the list, no objection to the rules was made then or subsequently, and still has not been.

Dooley asked to be subscribed to the list and was politely turned down by the (democratically elected) moderators as he wasn't a photographer. This accepted by Seamus who wrote to the moderators

"If that is not possible that is not a problem."

Later on 20th July he changed his mind, insisting,

"If issues are to be discussed in relation to Ireland I should be a member."

The moderators were aware that many Irish members had expressed a reluctance to be on a list with Seamus Dooley, rightly or wrongly feeling that there might be difficulties.

The moderators then took the very democratic decision to ask the list. A clear majority objected. Given this outcome they took the decision,

as is their right as moderators, and according to the list rules, to not allow the Irish secretary to subscribe. This second refusal was the reason for Dear's letter.

It appears that the General Secretary just wanted list rules set aside because he found photographers opposition to Drogheda inconvenient to his and Dooley's authority, and they had a requirement to 'shoot the messenger', NUJPhoto, and specifically the list owner, Pete Jenkins, in order to silence objections.

"It is also unacceptable for a member to prevent another member from being able to access and respond to derogatory comments being written about them".

Plenty of opposition to the Drogheda draft agreement had been expressed but that was legitimate and necessary debate of the issues and implications. It is fair to say many list members were highly critical of the NUJ proposal, but no derogatory comments had been written about Dooley and no complaints received. Had they been, they would have been dealt with under list rules by the moderators.

"It is also unacceptable for someone to seek to censor the views of another member in good standing"

Dooley had been offered the opportunity to present his views for publication on the list. He did not respond.

"It is also unacceptable that someone given a position of responsibility by the union should seek to use a union-financed facility which is there for all members to pursue a personal agenda against another member in good standing"

There was absolutely no 'personal agenda' and the General Secretary is here indulging in *ad hominem* attacks. List anger and incredulity was spontaneous, not orchestrated by Pete Jenkins. It was directed at an issue, not a person: the Drogheda deal, the proposal by our own union to endorse writers working as photographers without any consultation of freelance photographers whose livelihoods would be undermined. This should not really be too much of a surprise to the General Secretary if he recalls that the NUJ exists to protect the interests of members rather than eliminate their jobs.

Tim Dawson, Chair of FIC, then approached Pete Jenkins as instructed and made him aware of the General Secretary's views. Both the Drogheda draft and the NUJPhoto issue were apparently to be considered by the Emergency Committee of the NEC. The effect of Dear's letter was, necessarily, to provoke a discussion between Pete

Jenkins, whom the letter had made a personal target, and the moderators, about what to do.

Pete Jenkins then made the personal and unilateral decision to suspend the list. As he later explained in a lengthy explanation briefly posted to the home page of <http://www.nujphoto.co.uk> :

“What was also clear was that bringing up **NUJPhoto** at the same time, as Drogheda was a way of blaming photographers, and **NUJPhoto** activity for the reason so many NUJ members were unhappy with the Drogheda agreement as written. Too damn right!

I discussed my situation and that of the list with the moderators. Clearly the list as privately owned, and moderated by members elected from the subscribers was not under any union obligation even though the *Freelance Industrial Council* kindly endorsed the list and paid small annual amounts towards the lists upkeep. Members would not allow the *General Secretary* of the *National Union of Journalists* to dictate to a private list who might, and might not be allowed to subscribe, most especially as the list members had made it clear that this person was unwelcome.

The Background to the discussion

Whilst all this was going on the *NUJ* was embroiled in a heated discussion about the *Drogheda Independent* chapel, and an agreement which the *NUJ* management in Ireland wanted to endorse, which specifically allowed writers to carry cameras and do the job that photographer members had previously been hired to perform. <http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?docid=1798> (The paper had no staff photographers).

The *Irish Executive Council* had already rejected this agreement as unacceptable (The agreement had other sections which were untenable to union members, let alone the chapel themselves), and had referred it to the Unions *National Executive Committee*.

The General Secretary ordered a meeting of the *Emergency Committee of the NEC* to discuss Drogheda, and at the same time discuss the matter of **NUJPhoto** (as already mentioned). Not one moderator of **NUJPhoto** was invited to this meeting.

As members discussing union matters on **NUJPhoto** was clearly not an ‘emergency’ for the union, what reason could there be for bringing this up on an *Emergency Committee of the NEC*? Some have surmised that **NUJPhoto** might take emphasis away from discussion of the

Drogheda agreement, which had already been rejected by the *Irish Executive Council* - who can tell?

Now that the decision has been made, we are told that this agreement is actually to the benefit of Photographers, so we are all relieved. The *NUJ* endorses the practice of untrained writers doing the jobs previously done by skilled and trained specialist photographers, and fully supports its photographer members
<http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?docid=1815>

So what for the future of NUJPhoto

I alone made the decision to close down the list to avoid the tarnish of the General Secretarys' accusations affecting the discussion surrounding the Drogheda Agreement. I did this without proper consultation with the moderators and with the best possible motives. I did it under the most stressful of situations.

It is now clear to me that I was wrong to do this and what makes it worse for me is that it made no difference. Despite fulfilling the General Secretarys' request to resolve a situation, not of lay members making, this made no difference, to the union managements' response. Those who advised me to stand firm and make no attempt to accede to union management were correct in their assessment. I can only apologise to all members for my poor decision, and for causing so much anguish."

This version was withdrawn from the [NUJPhoto](#) site and the current, briefer and less provocative version substituted on 4th August.

On 6th August Pete Jenkins received the following letter from John Fray, Assistant General Secretary of the NUJ. This was the first notification of the outcome of the Emergency Committee's deliberations on 2nd August.

Dear Mr. Jenkins,

NUJ PHOTO

The elected Emergency Committee of the NUJ NEC met on 2nd August 2007 and considered this matter in detail, at some length.

At that meeting, the Committee was informed that NUJ Photo has been closed down by yourself on 1st August, you being the owner.

This site had been endorsed by the Union in 2005 after an application by you to the Freelance Industrial Council.

The NEC Emergency Committee is concerned that the site is in direct conflict with the decision of the NEC.

You are reminded that on receiving the report of the FIC, the site was first sanctioned by the NEC in July 2005 when the NEC carried a motion stating: "This NEC reminds all members producing material in the name of the NUJ that, as representatives of the NUJ, they should ensure their conduct reflects the standards expected of a national union."

The Irish Secretary was denied access to the site to respond to misleading and untruthful statements about himself, the Irish Organiser and the Union.

The NEC Emergency Committee is also concerned that a body operating with the approval of the union, using the union's name and its finances under the auspices of the NUJ was conducted in this way.

The NEC is seriously concerned at these recent developments, especially as you are a member of the NEC.

The NEC Emergency Committee wishes to make it absolutely clear that it does not sanction any restarting of NUJ Photo or other similar organisation which in any way utilises the name, logo or initials or in any other way may give the impression that it is in any way authorised by the NUJ or associated with the NUJ.

To do so is expressly forbidden, unless the NEC gives prior express written approval of any start, restart or continuation.

Further, the Committee requests return of the balance of the funds supplied to NUJ Photo by the Union since its funds were last forwarded to you. No further funds are to be provided without prior express written approval by the NEC.

The Union requires that you return forthwith to me, all NUJ membership names, addresses and any contact details, these being the property of the NUJ and permission for use of which by you, and NUJ Photo and any similar site is withdrawn forthwith by the NUJ.

It now appears that a new site has been started using the name of the NUJ. I require any reference to the NUJ and its name, logo and initials to be removed.

I therefore must now require your written undertaking by return of email and first class post that this new site will be immediately closed, the original site will not be restarted and no further new site will be started which in any manner, express or implied may give the impression that it is in any way associated with or authorised by the NUJ.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN FRAY
Deputy General Secretary

A detailed reply has been made to John Fray on 6th August, and we await further developments.

What happens now?

Meanwhile NUJ photographers still need somewhere we can talk to each other, no matter how inconvenient the NUJ finds the prospect. So the decision was taken to start this completely independent NVJPhoto mailing list..

The moderators would like to emphasise that this fight is not of their making, and that they would have far preferred to continue the debate within the NUJ's approved list. Unfortunately Union management will not now permit this.

We believe they are misguided and the debate itself must not be suppressed.

Accusations of disloyalty and arguments over the rules of a private mailing list are pure hubris. The moderators and list owner were all longstanding NUJ members whose commitment to the Union is unquestionable, and Pete Jenkins in particular has worked tirelessly to further the Union's aims and members' interests. The membership of the list comprised more than 200 photographers who care most about the NUJ. Nobody twisted their arms to join, they participated out of commitment.

This argument is not about inconvenience and frustration of officials who believe they are now being sabotaged after 6 months trying to reach agreement with a difficult employer. Nor is it even about the self-interest of the few photographers directly affected, nor even all photographers. It is that we see dangers that the management apparently do not yet see. The potential implications extend far beyond a single local agreement with a small Irish title, extending into the working lives of photographers and writers, both staff and freelance, and with major quality implications for reporting in general within the UK and possibly beyond.

What today looks like a gain to NUJ management, improved pay rates for staff writers and a closed shop in Drogheda, marks a precedent and watershed for the NUJ, and a line that once crossed will be

impossible to regain. It is not the authority of NUJ leadership we take issue with, it is their judgement in this matter.

This is not even slightly a question of technological evolution and inevitability as Seamus Dooley believes, it is ultimately a battle of cost and corporate profit vs. public entitlement to quality media. Quality of reporting is not some luxury consumer item, it is the distinction between information and propaganda without which democratic societies cannot exist. Dooley is quite correct that the practice of reporters carrying cameras is widespread; we cannot stop this, it will happen anyway. But for the Union to condone it is something else. Just because something can happen and does happen does not mandate the NUJ to negotiate away its principled guardianship of professional standards.

As photographers we seem to have a singularly hard time getting the NUJ to listen to us. The sad thing is that the nature of our journalism is not valued much by most of the public, and the Union reflects these low levels of visual literacy. Yet we have spent over a decade in the front line of trivialisation of the press, of commoditisation of our work, of aggregation of our intellectual property by large companies, most often as their wholly-owned asset at the cost of our equity. Our craft is hardly obsolete as the Irish Secretary asserts, in a world more filled with photographs than it has ever been. It is simply that very little of the value ever reaches the people who actually create it.

What has happened is that the economic rug has been stolen from under the feet of the people who know best and care most about photography. We know where this road leads, and the NUJ could learn a lot from us. In fact it must because it should be in no doubt that writers and broadcast journalists are next on the corporate cost-cutters' menu. Bloggers and citizen journalists and podcasters and free PR copy will be exploited to undercut written and broadcast journalism in exactly the same manner. It is happening already. Trinity Mirror are already planning to extend a network of local sites whose purpose is to invite and gather free content, which is then repackaged into advertising-supported free-sheets and posted through the letterboxes of the very people who created it. This will undercut and further wreck the viability of the traditional local press. Does anyone doubt that, given enough free and cheap content, a national daily free-sheet is a racing certainty? None of this is going to happen tomorrow or even next week, but it would be unwise to bet your career on it not happening.

The NUJ is sleepwalking into the abyss, unless it learns from the mistakes it has made over photography. If, as Seamus Dooley says, it is simply a matter that digital cameras allow anyone to take a decent picture,

then how will he respond when publishers argue that possession of a spellchecker or DVcamera allows anyone to write a decent article or make a decent broadcast feature? Out there among the millions of bloggers and streaming video clips is the proof this is coming. Publishers will grab it all, repackage, brand and sell it to the public, and – just as with photography – soon enough, hardly anyone will want to pay for it anymore because professionals are a needless expense. The publishers will still make profits, so they won't care. As print media move to the web and its advertising-driven models, this is inevitable. The NUJ's attention deficit will not only make most professional journalists redundant, but even itself.

There is much more to say about all this, and one way or another we will have this debate. Even if every branch, every official and every member puts their fingers in their ears, even if every reader, listener and viewer couldn't care less so long as it costs them nothing, it is true anyway, and we have no choice. Where the NUJ is going with Drogheda leads nowhere good : it is an epitaph for professional journalism.