

Several people have claimed to be the originators of the Photographers' Branch. I recall this being discussed in the 1980s. Very likely it's been discussed in every decade since Bert Hardy was a boy.

Over the last year the London Photographers' Branch (LPB) has become a reality. We've talked of a branch run "by photographers for photographers". I was proud to be building that with Jess Hurd, Marc Vallée, Jonathan Warren and other colleagues. I believed that we could accomplish a great deal that the NUJ has failed to do and that the time was right for a bold venture uniting photographers under the NUJ banner. I now need to make it clear why I am no longer a part of this initiative.

The discovery last month that most of the people who would be central to LPB are committed to an NUJ Left agenda took me by surprise. I had thought that I had assurances to the contrary.

Political pressure groups are entirely normal within a trade union. But NUJ Left is not just any old political force pushing their line within a trade union. The power and reach of the NUJ Left has ensured that their candidates have won every high profile election for many years. It was only the NUJ Left candidate who had a job created for him during a job freeze and at a time of redundancies. With members of NUJ Left including the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Vice President, the (outgoing) magazine editor, the Campaigns Officer and many members of NEC as well as other influential committees, it's clear that this low profile self-selected group has considerable power within and control of the NUJ.

I'd thought we were a group of colleagues working together to build a power base for photographers. In reality I was kept in the dark, and have been left feeling that I have been a useful patsy to disguise the real underlying aim of building a power base for NUJ Left. Not so much a branch "by photographers for photographers" but rather "by photographers for NUJ Left".

Why does it matter? The aims of NUJ Left are not the same as the aims of LPB and at times are very likely to be quite opposed to those of LPB. Imagine an LPB committee planning a campaign for a Photographers' Organiser. A majority of the committee will have already discussed this on NUJ Left. The timing, the best way to get a NUJ Left candidate into the post, whether to support this faction or that plan – this will all have been decided by the NUJ Left membership. The Photographers' Branch discussion will be meaningless, fake. Whatever the views of the LPB membership the committee vote will be preordained by loyalty to NUJ Left discussions and decisions. The NUJ Left bloc will always prevail.

I cannot present myself as a candidate to the new branch on the basis that I am putting forward and working for the interests of the membership when I know that in many important matters I will be powerless. The branch will in reality be directed by the demands of an entirely separate unelected group with its own very different aims and plans.

I won't stand for a position on a committee where I can only fight and lose. Where my role is that of a shoe tied behind a wedding car - I get to be at the wedding and even to go to the honeymoon - but in a merely decorative role and only ending up battered . We could have built a branch incandescent with energy and bursting with achievement, but without a genuinely independent voice for photographers then I cannot have a part in it.

David Hoffman