

UK National Union of Journalists withdraws its defence of Kit Klarenberg

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The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Britain has withdrawn its initial defence of *The Grayzone* news site journalist Kit Klarenberg.

Klarenberg, a member of the NUJ, was detained by UK counter-terrorism police at Luton Airport on May 17, after he arrived from Belgrade, Serbia where he lives. The *Grayzone* writer was interrogated; had his bank cards, electronic devices and SD cards seized; and had his fingerprints, photo and DNA taken, under Schedule 3 to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019.

The Grayzone made public the arbitrary anti-democratic detention of Klarenberg on May 30. On May 31, the WWSW denounced the attack, with an article headlined, “Oppose the detention of Kit Klarenberg! End British state intimidation of anti-NATO journalists!”

The WWSW noted, “Klarenberg was targeted for his journalism exposing the criminal activity of British imperialism and the NATO powers. *The Grayzone* noted in its report of these events published Wednesday how, in the past year, Klarenberg has ‘revealed how a cabal of Tory national security hardliners violated the Official Secrets Act to exploit Brexit and install Boris Johnson as prime minister,’ exposed ‘British plans to bomb the Kerch Bridge connecting Crimea to the Russian Federation’ and reported ‘on the CIA’s recruitment of two 9/11 hijackers.’”

The detention of Klarenberg took place weeks after UK police picked up French publisher Ernest Moret in London’s St Pancras station on his way to the London Book Fair and questioned him in connection with his participation in protests against the Macron government—in that case under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The WWSW ~~noted~~ ^{reported} that the has targeted by right-wing forces. Klarenberg used leaked emails to detail British warmonger Paul Mason’s scheming with influential security figures to shut down anti-NATO publications and organisations. Mason reported Klarenberg to the police.

On June 2, four days after Klarenberg’s treatment by the police was made public, the NUJ published a short article headlined, “NUJ expresses concern over detention of journalist Kit Klarenberg”. It read, “The National Union of Journalists has expressed grave concern over the arrest of journalist Kit Klarenberg at Luton airport under counter-terrorism legislation. Klarenberg was detained by plain-clothes police officers and threatened with arrest if he failed to comply with requests for information.”

“The apparent targeting of a journalist risks creating a chilling effect on others reporting on stories in the public interest and many will be aware that it follows the recent arrest of publisher Ernest M, also under counter-terrorism legislation by British police in April. Journalists will no doubt be astounded by actions of the police and rightly expect information on reasons behind Kit’s detention.”

Also on June 2, the NUJ’s twitter account retweeted a post from the Big Brother Watch Twitter account linking to the NUJ’s original article on Klarenberg.

But making its more than 24,000 members and the wider population aware of this matter of “grave” and “huge” concern was rapidly ditched. The article and the tweet were both removed from the NUJ’s site within 24 hours, on June 3.

The NUJ has provided no explanation for its actions.

At 5.11pm on June 3, Klarenberg tweeted “@NUJofficial has deleted its statement of concern about my detention. Concerning, given I was explicitly

asked about journalistic materials and + significant proportion of interrogation concerned journalism. This is of concern to all journalists entering and leaving the UK.” He added, “Both the online entry and an accompanying tweet of @NUJOfficial's ‘grave concern’ about my detention under counter-terror powers have been deleted. But it remains extant on their president's Twitter timeline. How could/why should any journalist trust them after this capitulation?”

The NUJ has not responded to requests from the WSWs for an explanation of why they have withdrawn support for Klarenberg. On Tuesday this writer contacted the NUJ's head office in London and asked for comment on the affair. An NUJ representative on reception said that nobody was in at the NUJ that week (!) and requested that the WSWs send an e-mail asking for comment to campaigns@nuj.org.uk. As the NUJ's press queries e-mail is listed on the organisation's web site as communications@nuj.org.uk, an email requesting comment was also sent to that address. The NUJ has not responded.

The NUJ's backtracking on its defence of Klarenberg came under fire on social media from those opposing the detention of Klarenberg. Freelance investigative journalist and former *Guardian* and *Observer* reporter Jonathan Cook tweeted June 5, “Another shameful day for the deeply compromised NUJ. It has deleted its statement of protest at counter-terrorism police interrogating and threatening investigative journalist Kit Klarenberg as he returned to the UK. Why are we paying dues to this fraudulent union?”

The NUJ's refusal to defend Klarenberg is of a piece with its history of abject capitulation to the government and capitalist state and is made more venal under conditions in which Britain is playing a central role in NATO's war against Russia—with supporters of the war such as Mason demanding a clampdown on any critical voice.

The NUJ has form on these issues, above all its treatment of the WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange. The NUJ refused to defend Assange for *almost a decade* following his initial arrest in London in December 2010.

On April 11, 2019, the NUJ finally issued a mealy-mouthed two paragraph statement in Assange's defence to cover for their culpability in his persecution by the US and British state apparatus. Their silence on

the persecution was no longer tenable on the day that the most prominent journalist on the planet was snatched by British police from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London—where he had received asylum for seven years—and then thrown into London's maximum security Belmarsh Prison.

The NUJ statement was, however, pro forma. On May 3, 2019, the NUJ held a meeting at the Free Word centre in London to mark World Press Freedom Day, at which its representatives, including NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet, ignored Assange and refused to link his name and the fight to end his persecution to the struggle for press freedom.

In response to protests from Assange supporters in the audience, including a WSWs representative, Stanistreet cynically commented, “To focus on Assange would be offensive to the memory of those who have been killed all over the world.”

The NUJ's executive only finally issued a substantive resolution opposing Assange's detention and moves by the US and British governments to extradite him on November 13, 2019—almost nine years after Assange's initial arrest.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact