

No room in Blair's bed for my union

I HAVE just received the "NUJ International Development Newsletter No.1". It describes a "partnership" with the Department for International Development in which "the NUJ will address the task of international development" so that it can make a "strategic contribution to poverty reduction".

This is a disgrace. Is the NUJ merely another "NGO" dependent on the Blair government for funding. No, it isn't. Then why is a trade union of journalists – those with the duty to tell the truth and keep the record straight – crawling into bed with a government which stands accused of prima facie war crimes for its illegal invasion of a defenceless country?

Putting aside that crime – if that's possible – the Department of International Development, in spite of its Orwellian name, is not a vehicle for genuine international development or poverty reduction. It is the prime carrier of the Blair regime's extreme ideology: neo-liberalism.

One needs to look no further than the ActionAid report, released on May 27, which reveals that the government is inflating the value of its already minimal aid to poor countries by a third and that the majority of all western aid, including Britain's, is actually "phantom aid".

This has nothing to do with poverty reduction and everything to do with a gravy train of "international advisers" and "consultants" whose aim is to implement the World Bank/IMF agenda of privatisation in poor countries that

are crying out for public services.

Witness the scandal of water privatisation which the "Department of International Development" has backed – in Africa and elsewhere – with the consequence of rising water prices for the poorest. DFID has paid out up to £9 million to the extreme free-market Adam Smith organisation for "advice" to poor countries on privatisation.

In a flood control scheme in Cambodia, in which DFID is involved, three-quarters of the budget is being spent on foreign consultants, office and administration. "Partnership" is the specious word that DFID uses in its promotion of the New Labour neo-liberal (i.e. imperial) project.

So why is the NUJ entering into a "partnership" with a government which journalists ought to be investigating and exposing, not joining in a partnership of sophistry and deception? Who authorised this? Was the membership consulted? What proportion of our subscription is now devoted to joining hands with the warmongers in Whitehall? We need urgent answers.

I call on my fellow NUJ members to write to Jeremy Dear and demand that the union cancels this very bad idea and, if necessary, to join together in a campaign to alert all our colleagues and the public. We are journalists, not functionaries and the fodder of spin doctors, and the public deserves better of us.

John Pilger
London SW4

Congratulations to whoever designed the NUJ website coverage for the BBC strike. Interesting, informative and constantly updated, it was a really good source of information. The links were good too and I particularly liked the coverage of Leeds branch with its cheerful looking baby.

Astrid Klemz Wells, Somerset

Discover who was responsible on Page 9

Beware of political correctness

SO. THE NUJ and Scope are getting together to tell us journalists how to "report disability" (Journalist, June). Yuk!

The first thing to say about Scope is that it used to call itself The Spastics Society and everybody knew straight away what it was about. Now it calls itself Scope and everybody has to think long and hard.

The second thing is that I am an epileptic, so I count myself among the disabled. If my journalist colleagues ever write about my disability, I hope they make a point of saying not just that I have epilepsy but that I suffer from it. If I didn't suffer from it, I would be a fool. People might think I enjoyed it.

Nobody wants to offend disabled people (though it is usually highly paid charity officers who do the complaining). But we should also think twice before we offend users of the English language (both able-bodied and disabled) who prefer an honest and robust turn of phrase to the bland, mealy-mouthed political correctness which featured in the article.

Michael Yates
Wakefield

Caps are OK

NUALA CALVI'S generally helpful piece on reporting disability (June) might usefully have added a couple of points.

Deaf people do not mind being described as 'the Deaf', with the capital D. This recognises that the Deaf are legally a cultural minority with their own language. As with reporting race, the bottom line on reporting disability should be – don't mention it unless it's strictly relevant.

G. Hunwick
Newcastle

Sack song contest, employ journalists

I FULLY support journalists striking to maintain their jobs in the face of BBC cuts. However, I was puzzled by the job axing decision following the disastrous Eurovision song contest. The licence to air this outdated competition cost £10 million in 2003, which is more than enough to pay the threatened staff.

Considering the UK's poor performance, dwindling audience figures and an apparent conspiracy between certain countries to ensure a regional victory, the show should be axed in the interest of good taste. Why is it that Euro pop

pap is deemed more important than news broadcasting? We shouldn't have to put up with such poor programming should we? Super-size me on intelligent content please Aunty.

Surely the BBC can do better than Euro pop? Nobody has bought the winners' records since Abba's Waterloo anyway. Why not let ITV buy the Eurovision licence next year and keep the journalists and the BBC's reputation of broadcasting quality.

Peter Angell
London SW16

