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# Press Release on Variant's removal from CSG venues

By Variant Magazine

Variant magazine have produced a press release addressing the response of James Doherty, Media Manager of Culture and Sport Glasgow and President of the National Union of Journalists, to a text published in Variant by Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt. 'The main thrust of the article is to expose the connections between the various board members of CSG and its trading arm and their multifarious business interests and strategies for culture, which point to the privatisation of a valuable public service and the erosion of the common good.'

Mute magazine will be hosting a public event covering these events and the wider issue of neoliberalisation of the arts to coincide with the PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED publishers fair on 3 August, held at Rochelle School, Arnold Circus, London E2. For more details, contact: variantmag@btinternet.com and anthony@metamute.org

[www.variant.org.uk](http://www.variant.org.uk)

**PRESS RELEASE 18 July 2008** Today, on the eve of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom Conference, a letter has been sent to the Ethics Council of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) calling for the immediate suspension of its President, James Doherty.

This letter contends that, in his position as Media Manager of Culture and Sport Glasgow, Doherty's actions, and the actions he has been party to with regard to Variant magazine, constitute conduct detrimental to the interests of the union, rendering him in breach of the union's Code of Conduct on several grounds.

Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG), is a limited company with charitable status that was set up to take over the running of culture and sport from Glasgow City Council, managing a multiplicity of venues including libraries, museums and galleries on behalf of the city council and the people of Glasgow. The current issue of Variant features an article about the controversial creation of CSG and the commercialisation of culture, which is based on an academic study undertaken by Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt at the University of Strathclyde. The main thrust of the article is to expose the connections between the various board members of CSG and its trading arm and their multifarious business interests and strategies for culture, which point to the privatisation of a valuable public service and the erosion of the common good.

Having passed over the opportunity to comment when contacted earlier this year for his input into research for this article, on publication Doherty immediately resorted to the threat of legal action over its content (9 June, re-iterated on 23 June 2008). Whether or not Doherty has sought legal advice at any point, the threat remains. Of itself, this approach is contrary to the interests of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. It also significantly calls into question the NUJ Code of Conduct which asserts that all journalists joining the union resist threats or any other inducements to influence, distort or suppress information. It is difficult to see how NUJ members can be expected to uphold their resistance to threats when its President is busy issuing exactly such threats to non-member journalists.

Doherty's primary allegation was that the article in question was littered with inaccuracies and potentially defamatory statements (9 June 2008). Variant immediately invited Doherty to identify such substantial inaccuracies, clearly stating that any significant errors would be corrected. His response expressed concern that the author has referenced newspapers as reliable and accurate

sources of facts, which is a major flaw in a so-called piece of academic writing. Out of 36 note references 12 are directly taken from newspapers. (23 June 2008) This derision of media sources as unreliable information per se brings journalism into disrepute. It undermines Rule 6 of the NUJ Ethical Guidelines which states that members shall not engage in any practice likely to corrupt the integrity of the public relations profession, the organisations they represent, the media or the NUJ and its members.

Variant replied on 28 June, rebutting the overwhelming majority of allegations (please see <http://www.variant.org.uk/clarcor.html>). That this was possible exposes Doherty's reaction as contravening the first clause of the NUJ Code of Conduct, that every member at all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.

As is made clear in Variant's response, newspapers are an invaluable resource for the academic researcher as they are for journalists, and are used in this article in the context of a range of other sources rather than being the sole basis for the article. Despite Variant's defence of the use of past journalism, Doherty continued to discredit the profession in this manner. It is understood that, when contacted for comment by the BBC, Doherty alluded to Variant's use of many sources which had been the subject of upheld complaints to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). Examination of the PCC online archive shows only one (not many) of CSG's complaints to have been upheld, against The Mail on Sunday (Scottish Edition) from 12 February, 2006. However, this article was not quoted in Variant. What is surprising in this case is that the President of the NUJ should have had, or claimed to have had, frequent recourse to the Press Complaints Commission. Incitement of defamation on such a scale is troubling from one whose role is to defend the freedom of the press.

While awaiting Doherty's litany of alleged inaccuracies, Variant learnt that an order had been issued to remove the journal from CSG managed venues. When a London-based journalist telephoned Tramway (CSG's flagship arts venue) to determine the source of this censorship, they were referred to James Doherty. In a reply to a Scottish Artists Union query about whether the magazine had been banned from CSG venues (25 June 2008), Doherty appears to implicate himself in the decision, aligning himself with the removal of the magazine and seemingly supporting its removal.

Today's letter to the NUJ, signed by the editors of Variant and the author of the article, maintains that Doherty's immediate recourse to legal threats and his justification of attempts at censorship surrounding Variant's removal from CSG venues represent an obvious conflict of interest with his role in the NUJ to uphold and defend the principles of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression, and the right of the public to be informed. The New Bohemia by Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt Variant issue 32, Summer 2008 Text version: <http://www.variant.org.uk/32texts/CSG.html> PDF version: <http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue32/Variant32RGN.pdf> PDF of CSG structure diagram: [http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue32/csg\\_diagram.pdf](http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue32/csg_diagram.pdf)

Variant co-editors and the author of the article, Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt, will be speaking in London on 3 August 2008 at a public event organised by Mute magazine to coincide with the PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED publishers fair, held at Rochelle School, Arnold Circus, London E2. For more details, contact: [variantmag@btinternet.com](mailto:variantmag@btinternet.com) <http://www.metamute.org> <http://www.variant.org.uk>