

# THE OWNERS

Steve Bell



EMAIL your letters to: [journalist@nuj.org.uk](mailto:journalist@nuj.org.uk)

POST them to: The Editor, 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP

DEADLINE April 21

## Support your local Remploy workers

I IMPLORÉ all journalists that have a Remploy plant in or near their area to do whatever they can to support fellow trade unionists who are facing uncertainty/difficulties/job losses etc due to plant closures or mergers.

The Government is trying to get more and more disabled people into mainstream employment, rather than retain specialist workplaces to cater for their (often complex) needs.

Please do your bit to keep the plight of this dedicated disabled workforce in the public eye. Get busy writing stories, taking photos, producing items for broadcast, or for use on the web, and help to boost the morale of those who reply on Remploy – Britain's biggest employer of people with disabilities – for their livelihood.

It's the least we can all do. The hard working team at Remploy is, it seems, forgotten – dare I suggest ignored? – by the majority of the media. Why?

**Roger Jones**

**NUJ Disabled Members Council  
Bedworth, Warwickshire**

## Posters were amateur

ISN'T IT about time that the NUJ provided printed placards for its members on picket lines?

I have every respect and sympathy for the strikers at the Milton Keynes Citizen, as a fellow Johnston Press employee. But their case with the town's residents could not have been helped by the placards pictured in the March edition.

The union needs to be as professional as possible in its dealings with the general public. Handwritten placards in spidery writing let everyone down. I doubt if many motorists driving past the

strikers could even read the message on the boards.

We must know, as journalists, that the presentation of our stories is becoming increasingly important in this visual age.

Surely, the NUJ even its present cash crunch state, can arrange for professionally printed placards to be made available to its next group of strikers? They will enable the members' message to be prominently displayed and easily read.

**Kevin Smith**

**Bognor Regis, West Sussex**

## Honest and accurate

VICTOR NOIR ("Honest PR", last issue) gets my approach to the job right – I'm a long-standing NUJ member after all – but the devil really is in the, albeit amusing, detail!

After gales hit Cumbria, blowing lorries over and killing one driver, GMTV actually asked, "Neil, how is it where you are?"

Having never claimed to be on the scene I responded: "Well I'm in a hotel in London and it's pretty blowy outside but it's not as bad as it is in Cumbria," before proceeding to tell them exactly what the situation was up there and what the Highways Agency was doing about it.

A bit different to Noir suggesting I told GMTV I didn't know what was going on?

**Neil Sterio  
Manchester**

## I do declare my interests

I WELCOME Mike Cross's suggestion (last issue) for a voluntary register of journalists' interests and think the practical ways in which this could be developed deserves some serious discussion.

For the past two years or so, I've chosen to make my own voluntary declaration of gifts and hospitality received, via my own website; perhaps coincidentally, I seem to get far fewer offers of hospitality these days than once I did.

I'm happy to make this information public, and feel that it is appropriate for a journalist to be transparent about this side of our business. My website also includes a brief statement on the ethical and professional standards I try to maintain, together with a link to the NUJ's Code of Conduct.

**Andrew Bibby  
Hebden Bridge**

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# Not true that I broke all strikes at the Sun

I AM willing to accept criticism for having resigned from the union. Some of it has been tough to read, but I expected it and respect almost all those who disagree with me.

What I am not prepared to allow to pass are gross inaccuracies that cast a slur on my record as a trade unionist, particularly the letters from Ian Blunt and Malcolm Withers. They are guilty of rewriting history.

Firstly, in my first two periods at The Sun (1969-71, 1971-73) I was responsible for leading strikes, most notably on behalf of the NGA print union when its members were locked out.

Secondly, I could not have broken the strike that Withers mentions in relation to Arthur Edwards, a friend of mine of more than 40 years standing.

I have checked with Arthur and he joined The Sun staff in January 1975. I was not employed by The Sun at the time. I was, in fact, the casuals' chapel FoC at the Sunday Mirror from 1975 until 1979.

Thirdly, in my third period at The Sun (1981-86), there were two NUJ strikes, in 1982 during the Falklands War, and in 1984. On the first occasion I did work for one strike day, which was the result of my having given my word personally

to Rupert Murdoch on joining the paper that I would not lead union action. But I joined the strike on the second day, not a glorious moment but nothing like as bad as Withers and Blunt suggest.

In July 1984, there was a further strike and I did not work at all, most obviously because it overlapped with my wedding and subsequent honeymoon. During both the 1982 and 1984 strikes, incidentally, NGA members crossed the picket lines.

That is directly relevant to my fourth point about why I decided to move to Wapping in January 1986 along with the overwhelming majority of the NUJ chapel. I have written extensively about this matter. It was a difficult decision, but I did not agonise unduly.

The simple fact was that I was not prepared to support people who had refused to support us.

I was also convinced that the print unions were doing all they could to stand in the way of technological progress.

Now I find myself at odds with the NUJ over its failure to engage with technological progress too. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

**Roy Greenslade  
Brighton**

# One person's email is someone else's junk

SO NICK INMAN (Gripe, last issue) is fed up with editors who don't reply to his emails. Has he ever considered that his emails are just another form of unsolicited junk mail that busy editors don't have the time to respond to?

Perhaps Nick should wake up and smell the 21st Century. These days we're bombarded with spam, badly targeted emails from PRs and offers of work from freelancers, many of whom have clearly not read the publication. If editors responded to all of these, half the day would be gone.

And as for following up with a conventional letter, doesn't he think that wasting paper is just adding unenviable environmental insult to injury? If someone

hasn't bothered replying to an email, there's little chance they'll reply to snail mail. Nick is obviously living in the 1950s if he thinks letters have any impact in 2008.

And just to emphasise how out of touch he is, Nick signed off with a comment about how staff journalists have "generous salaries". Laugh? I almost choked on my gruel.

No, Nick, you're clearly too sensitive for this line of work if silent rejection bothers you. Have you considered a career in non-competitive flower arranging?

**Craig Thomas  
Managing Editor, 4Car  
London W14**

# I feel I am cutting my own throat

MATHEW HULBERT (letters, January) paints a rosy picture of multimedia, at least in radio.

No-one objects to new technology. Indeed, I like to think as a working hack that learning to use a computer keyboard in the 1980s was progress from bashing out stories on a typewriter. That innovation made my job easier and more efficient.

What reporters object to, especially in the lower levels of the print trade where staff levels are dreadful, is having extra tasks and skills demanded of them without any degree of consultation or extra payment.

As we all know, news reporters now write for the internet and are being asked to make time-consuming videos (video work of course being totally beyond the remit of their original contracts).

No extra staff are employed for this; indeed at my newspaper (employing only one full-time senior) they took away one reporter to work at a so-called flagship in the group. It is this arrogant assumption that directors can squeeze extra output and skills from staff without extra pay that so annoys staff and demoralises them.

As I pointed out to my understanding acting editor recently, it would be a shame if competent and hard-working print journalists received an adverse work appraisal for making crap videos – a skill they neither seek nor need have any aptitude for, or they would have headed for television.

Personally, as a confessed print junkie, watching our best newspaper stories given away free on the internet while paper sales decline I feel like a man slowly drawing a knife across his own throat.

But I am doing my best to stop being an old reactionary and think instead of the huge riches that await us (well, the shareholders) from internet ad sales and showing videos that hardly any members of the public will bother to watch and run the danger of being nothing but a movie version of vanity publishing.

**Phil Dennett  
West Sussex**

IN YOUR last issue you carried photographs (on pages 9 and 16) of two women called Karen Jeffery at the Milton Keynes Citizen. Surely they cannot be related?

**Ronan Quinlan  
Dublin**



Jeffery



Jeffery