

Battle for quality as churnalists fight back

JOURNALISTS cannot do their job properly anymore, NUJ President Michelle Stanistreet said in a debate on the state of the profession in London in March. And it's not their fault, she added.

Standards are suffering because of the squeeze on jobs and resources and the consequent pressure to produce too much material too fast.

She was speaking at a debate on Flat Earth News, the book by NUJ member and Guardian freelance Nick Davies that has rocked the journalism establishment by exposing the way that UK national papers in particular produce their news.

He used the phrase "churnalism not journalism" to describe the constant and rapid recycling of unchecked information.

Michelle Stanistreet, a feature writer on the Sunday Express, said: "The inevitable result of the squeeze is that standards are suffering. Increasing numbers of journalists are feeling like churnalists. Time and again I have heard journalists on the ground saying this.

"They are unable to do their job as they would like to do it, checking out facts and getting out and about and talking to people. It is soul-destroying for people who became journalists because of their talent and enthusiasm.

"It is not journalists that create churnalism, it is the bosses running the companies."

Nick Davies told the meeting, organ-

ised by the Press Gazette: "We can't wrest media outlets away from these corporations and they are not about to loosen up and give us back our resources.

"We have got to fight back to make our own news judgements, that's what journalism is about. Every time we win a battle it matters."

The editor of the Press Gazette, Dominic Ponsford, said: "We have to compete online. We need to become better journalists so we can do the churning and then find the time to do the better journalism as well."

Andrew Gilligan, the former BBC defence correspondent now working for the London Evening Standard, said: "It is amazing how many stories based purely on government sources get into the papers, because journalists know they won't be denied and there won't be trouble."

He said that the former Observer political editor Kamal Ahmad, who is blasted in the book for peddling the Downing Street line during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, "didn't tell the lies about Iraq because he was overworked but because he was lazy and he wanted great stories from the government.

"At national level journalism should work well because reporters have more time to do their jobs properly."

Andrew Gilligan spoke of the series of exposés he had been doing of the people around London Mayor Ken



Andrew Gilligan speaks as Nick Davies (centre in blue shirt) and Michelle Stanistreet (far right) listen

Livingstone, which has led to one senior aide resigning.

"The other papers have not made any effort themselves to find out the truth," he said. "They have just reported that the Evening Standard says this and Ken Livingstone says that, but no-one has wanted to take the time to get into the story. It is not difficult, the information is in the public domain, but if it had been left to churnalism the story would never have happened."

But he challenged the assertion in Flat Earth News that reporters were overworked because of a huge expansion in the amount of editorial space to be filled. "The growth in space has not been in news but features and lifestyle stuff, most of which is supplied by freelances."

And reporters' work had made much easier by the internet. "The web has transformed the work of journalists; getting information is so quick. I would have had to have spent half a day going to Companies House for information on a company that I can now get in ten minutes".

LIFE ON FLAT EARTH

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Subs are so 20th century, says Archant

JOURNALISTS at Archant's daily newspapers in Ipswich are up in arms about plans to replace sub-editors with lower-paid and untrained staff.

Archant has announced "more than 20" redundancies at the East Anglian Daily Times and the Ipswich Evening Star, and a plan for subs' work to be handed to advertising designers who are not trained journalists.

Sub-editors at the papers earn over £26,000 a year, while the designers' maximum salary is £18,500.

Archant will not say exactly where

the redundancies will fall.

Six reporters have left the Evening Star this year without being replaced and the company has announced a pay freeze.

NUJ reps at the paper are warning that, as well as lowering the quality of the papers' content, the papers will run the risk of costly legal actions.

Martin Chambers, Father of the NUJ Chapel, described the plans as "a kick in the teeth" to journalists who attracted praise for their coverage of the Ipswich murders.

"The Daily Times has just been voted Regional Newspaper of the Year. Staff are being thanked by having their wages cut and losing their jobs.

"The use of non-journalists to lay out newspaper pages is a recipe for disaster. Without legal and journalistic training, they will have no idea of the potential pitfalls and the consequences could be catastrophic."

He added: "The company says that training is not needed to produce the newspaper. Perhaps the plan is to produce a newspaper without journalists."

Last year Archant posted profits of £30 million.

Strike wins promise of future pay

NUJ MEMBERS at the Milton Keynes Citizen have reached agreement with management at the paper, following months of negotiations and six days of strike action in January.

The agreement includes the establishment of a working group to check editorial quality at the Johnston Press title.

Journalists agreed to accept an offer of 3 per cent on 2007 pay – with more for the lower-paid. This will be backdated to April last year and negotiations on 2008 pay are to begin at once.

NUJ National Organiser Barry Fitzpatrick said: "Members at the Citizen are pleased that management has recognised journalists' concerns about investment in their local papers. When fewer journalists are being called upon to fill ever more column inches, there is a clear danger that quality will suffer.

"We're looking forward to constructive negotiations on 2008 pay that will ensure journalists at the paper can continue to concentrate on what they do best: reporting the news rather than making it."

NUJ Deputy General Secretary John Fray will be retiring on May 31 after 19 years with the union. An election will be held for his successor.

Reporter 'not guilty' in police leak case

MILTON KEYNES Citizen reporter Sally Murrer, facing police corruption charges, pleaded not guilty to obtaining police information illegally at the formal opening of the case on March 10.

She is facing three counts of "aiding and abetting misconduct in a public office" – an archaic common law offence that can carry unlimited imprisonment.

It is alleged she helped fellow defendant Mark Kearney, a former detective, to leak police secrets. Mark Kearney and two other defendants also pleaded not guilty to various charges.

Mark Kearney is the police officer who bugged the conversations of Labour MP Sadiq Khan and went public, when the matter came to light, with allegations that he was under pressure to do so.

The charges are not connected to the case but Sally Murrer has said she believes that police embarrassment is a motivating force for the prosecution, calling it "the missing piece in the puzzle".

She was arrested last May, strip-searched and held for 30 hours. Her home and the Citizen office were



KELLY BARNES

Sally Murrer (left) with the Mother of the Citizen chapel, Karen Jeffery, on the picket line in January

searched and police seized documents and a computer. They told the company they were investigating allegations of "police corruption and the leakage of confidential police information."

The full trial is scheduled to start in November and run for five weeks. The NUJ is helping Sally Murrer's defence.

Derry arms case: now the story can be told

EAMONN MCCANN, a well-known NUJ freelance and activist in Derry, will face an open trial for his involvement in a raid on an arms factory last year.

An extraordinary ban on reporting any aspect of the case was lifted by the Crown Court in Belfast in February. The trial begins on May 19.

Eamonn McCann was one of nine people are accused of breaking into the Derry premises of Raytheon Inc, an American firm that supplies hi-tech equipment to the British, Israeli, American and other military, in protest at the use of the company's equipment in the bombing of Lebanon by Israeli warplanes in August 2006.

The protestors were incensed that it was a Raytheon-guided "bunker buster" bomb that had destroyed a block of homes in the Lebanese town of Qena, killing 63 people, 42 of them children.

Computer equipment was thrown from windows and smashed but no-one

was injured in the early morning raid.

The "Raytheon 9" are accused of aggravated burglary, affray, theft, possession of ID tags and criminal damage. All are on bail.

The case has been dragging on for 18 months.

Derry Crown Court last year that banned all reporting of the case, all protests or anything else concerning the Raytheon company, and of the very fact that the order itself had been imposed.

The order was challenged in the Belfast court by an anarchist group from Derry. The Belfast judge ordered it to be lifted at once, before considering the challenge.

The union could not publicise the gag and did not join appeals for the gagging order to be lifted, because the NUJ Irish Executive Council had voted to support Eamonn McCann's case.

Legal officer Roy Mincoff said it would not be appropriate to make representa-



RONAN QUINLAN

Eamonn McCann: 'a crime to occupy a factory but not a country'

tions from the stance of media freedom or the public's right to know.

Eamonn McCann told the Journalist why he himself took the action: "We were trying to make a stand. The frustration became too much, particularly after the bombing of Qena. We had to do something after seeing the news on Lebanon every night."

When the nine saw little security about, "we sort of pushed our way inside."

"We hadn't really trashed it. All we did was to try to decommission the system. We threw PCs out of the window but we did make sure no-one was standing underneath."

He added: "If the state persists with its intention to proceed to a trial, it is saying that it's a crime to occupy a business premises, but not a crime to occupy a country; that it's a crime to drop computers from a window, but not a crime to drop bombs onto innocent people."

FATCAT FILE



YOUNG James Murdoch is set to earn up to \$20 million (more than £10 million) in his first year in charge of **NEWS CORPORATION's** European and Asian businesses. According to a regulatory filing, the benefits of nepotism for the son of News Corp chairman Rupert Murdoch include a base salary of \$3.4 million and a performance-related bonus that could go as high as \$15.9 million.

The Times came straight to the point and asked Piers Morgan — former editor of the **DAILY MIRROR** until his sacking in 2004 — how much he earned last year from his current activities as an author and television presenter. The reply was rather more evasive: "I don't want to reveal too much as I'm going through a divorce, but it's a good six figures — several multiples of the prime minister's salary." C'mon Piers. Surely you wouldn't want the missus to end up with anything less than her fair entitlement?

FUTURE PUBLISHING chief executive Stevie Spring — who joined the company in July 2006, after it issued six consecutive profit warnings — earned £505,000 in the year ending 30 September 2007. The wedge includes a basic salary of £285,000, which rose to £305,000 from the start of last October. She also owned shares worth around £300,000.

Natasha Kaplinsky has taken up her post as newsreader with **FIVE**, on the reported salary of £1 million a year (last issue). This is what she has to say about it: "It's an astonishing amount of money. I was shocked by it ... Five seem to think I am [worth it] but, no, how can anybody justify that? A dustman is worth £1 million for cleaning up the rubbish, as far as I'm concerned." Or the people who write her scripts?

£6,000 A YEAR: OUR GIFT TO EMPLOYERS

BRITISH JOURNALISTS are giving employers nearly £6,000 a year each by working unpaid overtime, according to the TUC. They are 50 per cent more likely to work unpaid than the rest of the working population, making the industry one of the worst offenders in exploiting their employees' goodwill. The TUC survey shows that four in every ten media workers put in more than six hours unpaid overtime every week, worth £5,884 a year per person. Across the sector, 49,000 employees work unpaid overtime worth £288 million a year to employers.

Ballots for the union's National Executive Council for 2008-09 saw the following elected: PR and Information: Anita Halpin; London: Tom Davies, Nick Serpell, Phil Sutcliffe and Pierre Vicary; Midlands of England: Barbara Goulden and Lucy Lynch (jobshare); North West England: Chris Frost.

Strike vote as £40m a year Desmond offers hacks 3%

NUJ MEMBERS at Express Newspapers in London are voting on strike action following a breakdown in talks over pay.

Journalists are furious that the company is refusing to increase its pay offer above 3 per cent, well below current levels of inflation. Employees at the company's printers recently won a pay award of 4.3 per cent.

The NUJ chapel, which covers the Daily and Sunday Star and their offices in Glasgow and Broughton, Lancashire, wants a rise of 10 per cent and a one-off bonus payment to all staff — and for casuals — to reflect the company's healthy financial position.

Proprietor Richard Desmond, boss of the Northern and Shell group that owns the titles, paid himself £40.6 million in 2006. The Times described him as "the most lavishly remunerated owner in Fleet Street".

Northern & Shell's annual turnover has increased more than eightfold to £460 million since it bought Express Newspapers in 2000.

Chapel officials estimate that the 3 per cent pay rise would cost the company £750,000. To pay the 10 per cent would set them back £2.5 million — about 6 per cent of Richard Desmond's income.

But when he met union reps last

year he said: "You want to give proper wage increases but you can't because everything else has gone up."

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ President and chapel rep at the Express, said: "It's hard for members to see why we should stomach a pitiful pay rise when the proprietor pocketed over £40 million. Management has treated the union with contempt, imposing a settlement that amounts to a pay cut without meaningful negotiations."

Union reps have been trying to negotiate the increase since last October.

They have been told by editorial director Paul Ashford that if they accept 3 per cent there will be "no beastly staff economies this year to make everyone insecure and miserable."

There have been successive rounds of redundancy since Richard Desmond bought the titles, with editorial staff falling from 968 to 532 between 1996 and 2004, the last year for which figures are available.

NUJ National Organiser Barry Fitzpatrick said: "Journalists feel they have no choice but to ballot for industrial action. We've done everything we can to come to an agreement with management but they simply aren't taking our members' concerns seriously."

Journalists and supporters in Media Workers Against the War demonstrated outside the Express group head office in London in February in protest at its reporting of migrants and Muslim people.

Around 40 protesters waved banners saying "stop media attacks on Muslims" while chanting slogans such as "Daily Express, Daily abuse".

MWAW sent a letter to Northern and Shell proprietor Richard Desmond and Daily Express editor Peter Hill citing examples of inflammatory headlines. The letter said the headlines "do nothing to inform Express readers — on the contrary they encourage racist stereotyping and contempt."

POLICE PAY, APOLOGISE FOR ASSAULT ON PHOTOGRAPHER

FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER Marc Vallée has won an apology and compensation from the Metropolitan Police for an assault that left him quite seriously hurt.

He was taking photographs of a demonstration in Parliament Square, central London, in October 2006 when he was shoved to the ground and struck his back on a kerbstone.

He was paralysed for a time

and had to be taken to hospital for treatment.

NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear said: "Marc will be pleased to have finally got an apology from the police, but it is no cause for celebration.

"It is disgraceful that the police brutally obstructed a member of the press from reporting on a political demonstration."

New jobs for old as BBC members vote

THE NUMBER of BBC journalists to lose their jobs compulsorily in the current round of redundancies could be in the low double figures.

The BBC wants to get rid of 1,800 posts and the unions have been in intensive negotiations to chip away at the total.

A deal was reached in January that stipulates that new jobs will be found for one in eight of those to go.

Members were voting on it as the Journalist went to press and were expected to accept it.

The current number of compulsory redundancies was reckoned to be around 250 across the corporation as the ballot papers went out and was

expected to fall even further.

BBC News could be left with only a dozen compulsory redundancies to find, despite more than 400 posts being axed in the division.

NUJ Broadcasting Organiser Paul McLaughlin said: "We've been in some very tough negotiations with the BBC but this agreement follows significant movement by the corporation on all the issues that are in dispute."

The unions held a ballot for strike action against the redundancies over the new year.

That ballot – expected to have shown a big "yes" vote – has never been counted, and was put aside when the provisional deal was reached.

BRENDAN JOINS THE WINNING LINE

HOLLYWOOD SCREENWRITERS settled their strike (last issue) after 100 days when the Writers Guild of America (WGA) reached a deal that grants writers "residual rights" to income from the sale of DVDs and online syndication of their work.

Shortly before the settlement the picket lines were visited by the NUJ's own screenwriter Brendan Foley who has written and produced two movies himself. He said later: "They seem to have quite a good settlement."

Brendan Foley, a former member of the NUJ national executive, teaches screenwriting and feature writing on the union's professional training programme.

GLENN CAMHI



With Brendan Foley (left) were three members of the WGA – Doug Molitor, Shelly Goldstein and Carl Gottlieb, the writer of *Jaws*. His placard records the support of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain

SAFETY FEARS AS ITN CUTS NIGHT-TIME CABS

BROADCASTING UNIONS are trying to stop ITN putting staff safety at risk by scrapping late night taxis to and from work. The move is part of a programme of cuts in benefits designed to save the company £300,000 a year. ITN wants to cut back on weekend and night working payments and scrap free meals for some staff.

In discussions with the NUJ and BECTU, managers came up with new proposals including the use of shuttle buses after 10.30pm, minicabs and additional free car parking spaces for staff working unsocial hours.

But unions are wary of the revised proposals. NUJ broadcasting organiser Paul McLaughlin said they were completely unacceptable. "We have got major concerns and we will not accept solutions that will compromise people's safety."

NUJ tells Ofcom to respect public interest

THE UNION has called on UK communications regulator Ofcom to use the digital airwaves to maintain and strengthen public sector broadcasting.

In a submission on the future of digital terrestrial television, the NUJ expressed concern about proposals to leave the allocation of digital broadcasting spectrum to market forces. There are worries that with a market-based approach, public service commitments could be lost.

The NUJ argues that broadcasters should be allocated part of the digital

spectrum for HDTV services in return for public service commitments.

This would enable those such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 to continue to provide high quality programming that serves the public interest.

Paul McLaughlin, NUJ National Broadcasting Organiser, said: "The airwaves are a national resource that should be used for public good, not private profit. We must never allow public service broadcasting to become ghettoised. Ofcom must put public interest ahead of market philosophy."

Al-Jazeera is made to pay for sacking

A PROMINENT NUJ member who tried to organise for the union at the al-Jazeera TV network headquarters in Qatar has won an amazing court case over her sacking.

In March the Qatar Supreme Court awarded Yvonne Ridley 100,000 Qatari Rials (about £13,800) after a marathon legal battle that began in November 2003. She was sacked without warning from her job as a senior editor in Doha, Qatar where she had helped launch al-Jazeera's English language website.

A series of exclusive stories highlighting US military injustice in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a confrontation between her and her bosses after American officials complained and the stories were pulled.

"Perhaps I was overly combative in my style of management but I just felt this sort of editorial interference was unacceptable," Yvonne Ridley said. "No one was disputing the facts of the stories, but it was obvious the US military were uncomfortable, to say the least, when the stories were published.

"I was surprised that the English side of the station was capitulating when the Arabic broadcasting side of the station was ground-breaking and heroic in its coverage of both wars."

Yvonne Ridley also upset senior al-Jazeera management when she launched an NUJ chapel after discovering a huge pay differential between

Arab, Asian and Western journalists.

"I felt we should all be paid the same and wanted to try and raise the wages of my Arab colleagues," she says. "I challenged the editor in chief and asked why someone should be paid lower because they came from the Arab world.

"When I was sacked I received a letter saying I was a threat to national security. It was a deeply worrying time especially when the administration department refused to hand over my passport for five weeks. But, thanks to the NUJ, it has ended on a positive note. My experience should highlight, once again, the importance of keeping up your NUJ membership. I would never have got justice without the union's support."

Her case was backed by the NUJ and she had the support of Qatar's top employment lawyer Gebran Majdalany, who continued the case for free after NUJ funding ran out in the marathon process, which went to the Qatari Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.

"Al-Jazeera's legal strategy was to drag it out and we would eventually run out of funds. They hadn't counted in the tenacity or dogged pursuit for justice from Gebran Majdalany's firm."

Yvonne Ridley added: "I hope what has happened in Qatar will help remove some of the stereotyping and myths about justice in Arab lands and their treatment of women. What happened



Yvonne Ridley (second from right) with the founding committee of the NUJ chapel she helped start at al-Jazeera in Qatar in 2003. With her were, from left: Shaista Aziz, Hilary Saunders and Shaheen Chughtai

to me was a result of a clash of management and editorial styles at al-Jazeera. I am still a great admirer of al-Jazeera and the journalists working there."

Yvonne Ridley is a former Sunday Express roving reporter who hit the headlines herself when she was kidnapped by the Taliban in Afghanistan while covering the US-led invasion of 2001.

She later converted to Islam and became a leading anti-war campaigner, standing as a candidate for the Respect party at the last UK general election.

She became a presenter for the London-based Islam TV satellite channel, where she was sacked last year. She is bringing a tribunal case for unfair dismissal and sex discrimination against the channel, again with NUJ backing.

She now works as a presenter and producer for Press-TV, an Iranian-owned English-language channel.

Colleagues will be walking the 26 miles across the Isle of Wight on May 18 to raise funds for a hospice that cared for a journalist, Jeremy Price, who died last year. Details from www.justgiving.com/teamjeremy or www.iwhospice.org



MICHELLE JOINS TOP UNION LINE-UP

THE BRITISH TUC Women's Conference has elected NUJ President Michelle Stanistreet to a leading union body in the fight against gender inequality in the workplace.

She has won a place on the TUC Women's Committee which takes a lead on gender issues for the British trade union movement. The election comes towards the end of her term as NUJ President, a position that has only been held by four women in the union's 101-year history.

Michelle Stanistreet, who works

for the Sunday Express in London, said: "Experience has taught us that if we want to tackle workplace inequality, whatever its causes may be, the best way of doing it is by using the collective strength of trade unions.

"I'm looking forward to playing my part in fighting for fair and equal treatment for all."

Michelle Stanistreet is second from left in the photo, with, from left, fellow NUJ delegates Cath Rasbash, Lena Calvert (front), Barbara Goulden and Christina Zaba.

Agency future must be ours, says union

THE NUJ is calling on management at the finance news agencies Thomson and Reuters to get into urgent talks with the union, following the final go-ahead for their £8.7 billion merger by regulators in Europe, Canada and the USA.

Management at both companies had been saying that uncertainties around the regulators' decisions were preventing them from engaging in meaningful consultation with unions. What is effectively a takeover of Reuters by Thomson of Canada will be finalised in April.

Journalists at Reuters had been about to vote on industrial action to force managers to discuss the implications for staff. They were worried at a company plan to impose changes to journalists' career structures. Reuters agreed to put back the proposals and the strike ballot was called off in February.

The NUJ's National Organiser for Newspapers and Agencies, Barry Fitzpatrick, said: "We're pleased that Reuters management saw sense and suspended the implementation of these changes. But members, both in Reuters and Thomson, still have concerns.

"They want to know the implications for jobs, work roles and career progression. In particular, they are looking for a commitment that any redundancies will be voluntary.

"The companies need their employees' support to make this new venture a success, so the sooner they meet with their recognised unions the better."

■ THE NUJ and French journalists' union SNJ-CGT have launched a joint legal action against Bloomberg News in Paris.

The unions claim that the company has underpaid staff and broken the collective agreement that covers the pay and working conditions of French journalists in France.

The case is that Bloomberg has failed to properly apply two bonus schemes. In one, the company introduced a "13th month" bonus as required under the agreement, but only by cutting journalists' base salaries. In the second, the company calculated a seniority bonus using only the minimum wage, rather than journalists' full salaries.



Samira Ahmed (left in picture) presented this year's George Viner awards to four of the five students receiving grants, from left, Osama Baig, Julie Bailey, Natalie Reeve and Samantha Wong, with NUJ President Michelle Stanistreet and Lionel Morrison, chair of the Black Members Council. The fifth winner, Sandra Johnson, could not be present.

Change the world by example, says Channel 4's Samira Ahmed

IT IS NOT the job of black journalists to "go out there and re-educate the overwhelmingly white, middle aged elite running the news", Channel 4 News presenter and reporter Samira Ahmed told the union's annual George Viner Fund ceremony in February.

Giving advice to the ethnic minority journalism students receiving this year's bursaries to help them through their studies, she said they should not just see "an uphill struggle in the fiercely competitive world of news journalism.

"Just by doing the stories you choose to tackle and being true to yourself, you will be changing newsrooms for the better."

The young journalists should see their background and experiences as a great asset - but "they are not a substitute for working hard, pitching good stories, and writing well".

Samira Ahmed added: "Most of all enjoy yourselves. Journalism has been for me fascinating, thrilling and never boring."

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Black and poor, how to get into journalism? PAGE 13

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2008

NEW MEDIA ARE KILLING JOURNALISM

Debate and panel discussion

Friday May 2, 10 am–12 noon
at the Frontline Club, Norfolk Place, London W2

Speakers include

ANDREW KEEN author of *Cult of the Amateur*

SIMON KELNER editor, the Independent

NICK DAVIES author of *Flat Earth News*

Admission free but registration required.

Registration opens on April 1 at

www.unesco.org.uk

The NUJ is part of the Press Freedom Network which is organising the 2008 event with the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the Frontline Club