

# Germans fight back against Montgomery

NEWSPAPER BOSS David Montgomery is facing a newsroom revolt at his titles in Germany. Staff on papers owned by his European group Mecom have demanded changes in the way they are run in the face of massive spending cuts.

David Montgomery earned a reputation for ruthless cost-cutting when he was chief executive of the Mirror Group in London in the 1990s. He sacked more than 100 journalists, including most of the leading members of the NUJ at the group, and at the Independent, which was under Mirror group management for a time.

He is now building a Europe-wide empire, taking over papers and cutting costs to achieve profit margins of up to 20 per cent.

He bought the Berliner Zeitung in 2005 and the Hamburg Morgenpost in 2006, and is now seeking cuts of €5 million – 20 per cent of spending – at a time when investment is needed for the papers to establish decent websites.

Representatives of the two German journalists unions, the DJV and Ver.di, visited the NUJ in London in March to seek the union's support.

In February the journalists wrote to David Montgomery and the manager he has installed, Josef Depenbrock, demanding that they "rethink the current business policy" and urging him to invest in the titles. "If Mecom is unable to come up with such a strategy, a new, appropriate proprietor should be sought," said the letter.

Josef Depenbrock holds the positions of editor-in-chief and chief executive, in defiance of the papers' editorial



MARKUS WAECHTER/APIPA PHOTOS

Montgomery: continental cost-cutter

statutes, which stipulate they must be kept separate. The unions are mounting a legal case for a court order that the posts be separated.

Staff told Josef Depenbrock: "After almost two years of your administration, all of our fears have been realised. You are either unwilling, or unable, to adequately control the editorial department. We have lost faith in you. Stand down."

Nineteen top journalists have left the titles and not been replaced. Working conditions are deteriorating and there are fears for editorial quality. Journalists say morale is very low.

Journalists are struggling to produce the websites on an 11-year-old computer system. To work on the sites they have to use the superior terminals in the secretarial department, which they have dubbed the "internet café".

The German daily paper market is highly competitive, with 12 in Berlin alone.

Mecom owns more than 300 titles in Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Ukraine and employs 12,000 people.

JAWED AHMAD, an Afghan journalist working for a Canadian television network who has been held for four months without charge has been designated an "unlawful enemy combatant" by the US military. He was detained last October at a NATO airbase in Kandahar and transferred to the notorious detention centre at Bagram airfield, north of Kabul. According to local reports, he had interviewed the Taliban for a story, which is common for Afghan journalists.

## Editor faces 10 years in jail

A LEADING journalist from the Burmese weekly Myanmar Nation was arrested in February after police and intelligence officials conducted a four-hour search of the office.

Chief Editor Thet Zin was held along with office manager Sein Win Maung. Thet Zin was able to meet his wife in a police station three days later and told her he was facing a 10-year sentence, though he did not know what he had been charged with.

The next day police returned to the Myanmar Nation office for a three-hour search and seized data from Thet Zin's computer. They then closed the office. Myanmar Nation was published with clearance from the official censorship board.

Thet Zin had been a student democracy activist before working for various weekly journals. He was arrested and tortured in the pro-democracy uprising of 1988.

## Activist shot in 'death warning'

THE NUJ has joined its sister union in Colombia to condemn the murder of radio journalist Manuel Arturo Macías Cerrera on Colombia's national journalists' day.

He was shot as he was going home on February 9 in Algeciras, central Colombia. A founding member of the Journalists' Association of Huila, part of the Colombian Federation of Journalists, he was also the sole opposition councillor on Algeciras council.

Eduardo Márquez, President of the federation, said: "The cowards who shot our colleague were sending us a death message when we were celebrating Colombia's Day of the Journalist."

"We got the message. We will double our efforts to ensure our safety throughout the country, but also be increasingly alert in keeping an eye on the intolerant, be they corrupt politicians, paramilitary groups, guerrillas, corrupt state agents or organised crime groups."

The NUJ has strong ties with the federation and assisted in its formation last year.

## Reporter sent back to prison

THE MOROCCAN supreme court has rejected an appeal by journalist Mustapha Hurmatallah against a seven-month jail sentence over a story in Al Watan Al An newspaper last July that revealed internal government documents on security and terrorism.

Mustapha Hurmatallah and managing director Abderrahim Ariri were arrested and charged with receiving documents obtained by criminal means. Abderrahim Ariri received a six-month suspended sentence.

The Casablanca appeals court reduced both sentence by a month but now both have been confirmed by the supreme court.

The International Federation of Journalists backed the Moroccan journalists' union's call for the charges to be dropped. IFJ President Jim Boumelha, who is himself Moroccan, said: "There can be no claim to press freedom in Morocco if the courts are throwing journalists into prison for doing their job."



## NOW IRAQI JOURNALISTS' LEADER IS SHOT DEAD

**THE PRESIDENT of the Iraqi Union of Journalists, Shihab Al-Timimi, has become the 250th journalist to be killed in the country since the invasion five years ago. He was fatally wounded on February 27 when four gunmen opened fire on his car.**

**Shihab Al-Timimi, 74, was hit by a hail of bullets following a meeting of the union leadership in the Al Wazeiriyah district of Baghdad about plans for a seminar on the safety of journalists.**

**His life had been spent in the struggle for an independent, democratic and secular Iraq. He was first imprisoned in 1948 at the tender age of 14, as a member of the banned Iraqi Communist Party. His commitment to social justice saw him imprisoned many times after this, under the regime of Saddam Hussein.**

**He was later to leave the Communist Party, but always remained committed to the goal of a democratic, non-sectarian, independent and secular Iraq.**

**These principals enabled the Iraqi Union of Journalists, and its predecessor the Iraqi Syndicate of Journalists, to remain politically independent, non-sectarian and secular, while many other organisations in Iraq have split along religious or political lines in the chaos and social breakdown since the invasion. Shihab Al-Timimi was implacably opposed to the US and British occupation.**

**He was an outspoken opponent of sectarian violence and he spent his life defending journalists and journalism. His was dedicated to improving the safety of Iraqi journalists and fighting to preserve their independence and professionalism.**

**The NUJ has supported the call by the International Federation of Journalists for the UN to lead the defence of journalists and the media in Iraq. The union has demanded that the Iraqi government investigate this crime and prosecute those responsible.**

David Ayrton

# State 'is trying to throw Russian union onto street'

THE INTERNATIONAL Federation of Journalists is calling on journalists' unions around the world to join protests over a "cynical campaign" by Russian political bosses to close down the Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ).

For the past year state agencies in Moscow have been trying to evict the union from the premises it has occupied for almost 30 years, claiming the building is unsafe.

Now the RUJ has learned that the government is trying to sell the building to a private owner and throw the union onto the street.

"The Russian union has been one of the most strident critics of government pressure on independent journalism," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "It is the victim of intimidation and a

cynical campaign by its political opponents who have failed to close the union using trumped up charges of breaching fire regulations, who are now trying to sell off offices that the union insists are legally their own."

The IFJ traces the campaign against the union to the World Congress of Journalists it hosted in Moscow in June last year when journalists' leaders from almost 100 countries strongly criticised attacks on press freedom and the government's failure to act over the killings of journalists.

"This crisis is not a property dispute," said Aidan White. "It is a determined effort to stifle the voice of independent journalism in a country where democracy is under fire and media freedom has been plunged into darkness."

## Azeris facing harassment

A COURT IN Azerbaijan has sentenced Ganimat Zahidov, the editor of the opposition daily Azadlig, to four years in prison for "aggravated hooliganism" and "assault and battery" in connection with an incident last year in which he was accosted by a stranger.

He was summoned by the police three days later and has been held ever since. The man who accosted him got an 18-month sentence.

Ganimat Zahidov regards the incident as deliberate provocation in retaliation for his articles, including those accusing Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev's wife of corruption.

Azadlig ("freedom" in Azeri) is often the target of harassment. Ganimat Zahidov's brother Sakit, a reporter for the paper, was sentenced last year to three years in prison for possession of drugs, although prosecutors failed to prove that he possessed any.

Sakit Zahidov began a hunger strike in prison on February 3 to protest against his conditions of detention and to demand medical attention. He staged two hunger strikes last year, demanding to be transferred to a hospital for treatment.

Another Azadlig reporter, Agil Khalilov, was attacked and beaten in February.

## Presenter raped, killed

REBECCA Wilbrod Kasujja, presenter of a morning show on community radio station Buwama FM in Uganda was raped and killed by unidentified assailants in February.

She was on her way to the station when she was attacked. Villagers found her body later that day. Fellow journalists believe she was attacked because of her journalistic work.

"This incident once again highlights the dangers facing journalists who work odd hours," said Ugandan Journalists' Union President Michael Wakabi. "Female journalists, who form the bulk of newscasters, are particularly vulnerable."

REPORTER Mike Chipalasa and managing editor James Mphande of the Daily Times in Malawi have been charged with "publishing false news likely to lead to a breach of public order", over an article quoting an opposition leader as saying the government was trying to rig the 2009 elections.

FAUSTIN Bambou, editor of a weekly in the Central African Republic, was sentenced to six months in prison in January but pardoned after six weeks. He had been charged over an article claiming that two government ministers received massive commissions from a French nuclear company.