

President

MICHELLE STANISTREET, NUJ President for the last year, stops to draw breath and sum it all up

I USED TO roll my eyes when my nan would start on one of her “doesn’t time fly” contemplations so I’ve felt really old in the last few weeks when I’ve found myself – several times – saying precisely the same thing.

It seems just yesterday that I was at ADM in Birmingham, with Chris Morley passing on the presidential chain of office to me, feeling just a little bit sick at the thought of how I was going to fit it all in.

But the evidence is there in my rather dog-eared diary of the year. I’ve somehow managed to fit plenty in, admittedly winging it from week to week, juggling a full-time job at the Sunday Express with what has often seemed another full-time job as NUJ President.

There’s been chapel meetings, branch meetings, banners to carry, conferences, events, speeches, envelopes to stuff, demonstrations, committee meetings, trustee meetings, pay negotiations, placard waving, pickets to join, members to meet, email exchanges with sister unions abroad, bosses to slag off, more speeches, and hours and hours of general chitchat at head office.

So there’s certainly been no shortage of conversation topics when I’ve been out and about. Fresh from last ADM, the conference decision to call for a boycott of Israeli goods provoked debate aplenty. Then there was the Drogheda Independent house agreement in Ireland that provoked concern in some quarters about the future of photography and the general debate about how the NUJ is geared up to meet the challenges of new technology.

Any regular reader of the Journalist knows there are vastly different opinions among members on all of these issues. And thank god for that – one of the strengths, I think, of this union is that we’re a broad church. Of course we’re going to have our differences from time to time, that’s what makes us the vibrant, diverse and, most importantly, grass-roots led union we are today and why we’ll still be going strong in another hundred years.

What’s important is that we come together collectively on issues that matter to all of us, as journalists and as trade unionists. And my answer to anyone I meet who has a moan about what the union is doing, or not doing, on one issue or another is: get off your arse, get involved and change things; maybe

Our differences make us the vibrant, diverse and grassroots-led union we are



Michelle Stanistreet led the protests on Stand Up for Journalism day in Manchester

How we flew



ALAN JOHNSTON

Alan Johnston: meeting him after his kidnap release was the highlight of the year

my tolerance for whingeing is low, given I that have daily small doses of from my four-year-old son!

There are lots of highlights to choose from: first, the day the BBC’s Alan Johnston walked free, after 114 days in captivity in Gaza. It was a pleasure to meet him soon after his release and I’m looking forward to hearing him speak at ADM in Belfast.

On the campaigning front, Stand Up for Journalism was launched to brilliant success on November 5 – the first union-wide day of action in 20 years. There were so many sleepless nights in the run-up to that day, but the amazing number of events, meetings, conferences and demonstrations held on the day made it all worthwhile.

Members from all over the union’s nations and regions pulled out all the stops to make it a really memorable occasion. So many people have told me how it really reinvigorated their enthusiasm and commitment to the union, which was so great to hear.

It won’t stop there – the campaign is broadening out into a recruitment phase that will start with a reps’ week, to engage and support our reps. But winning new members and retaining existing ones is the responsibility of every NUJ member. It’s the only way we can keep union density strong in places we already have recognition, and gain new agreements where we don’t, and it’s the only way we can truly strengthen our collective might.

It’s also the fundamental solution to the financial problems we currently face. We’ve got to recruit our way out of them and emerge from what is undoubtedly a tough financial climate as a stronger, better equipped fighting force.

If we all went out and recruited one extra member this year our problems would disappear. Until then, yes, unpopular decisions will have to be made, at the coming ADM and no doubt in the future, but our shared priority has to be keeping the NUJ in good financial health and ensuring we’re in fighting shape to meet the challenges of the next hundred years, and beyond.



JOANNE O'BRIEN

A year ago: Michelle Stanistreet with three-year-old son Wilf as she began her presidency