

# JOURNALISM

# *matters*

**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
JOURNALISTS

An NUJ campaign  
to defend quality  
journalism

## Act now to defend quality journalism

**Jeremy Dear**  
General Secretary

Hundreds of job cuts in the local newspaper industry in recent months threaten the quality of journalism and the public's right to know said Austin Mitchell MP, chair of the NUJ's Parliamentary Group, after forcing a Commons debate on the wave of redundancies sweeping the industry.

The cuts don't just affect jobs but have resulted in the merger of titles, pagination being reduced, editions and sections being closed, departments being amalgamated and fewer resources for journalism. Specialist reporters' posts have been axed. As a result, local newspapers are in danger of being unable to properly fulfil their vital role on behalf of the public in holding power to account.

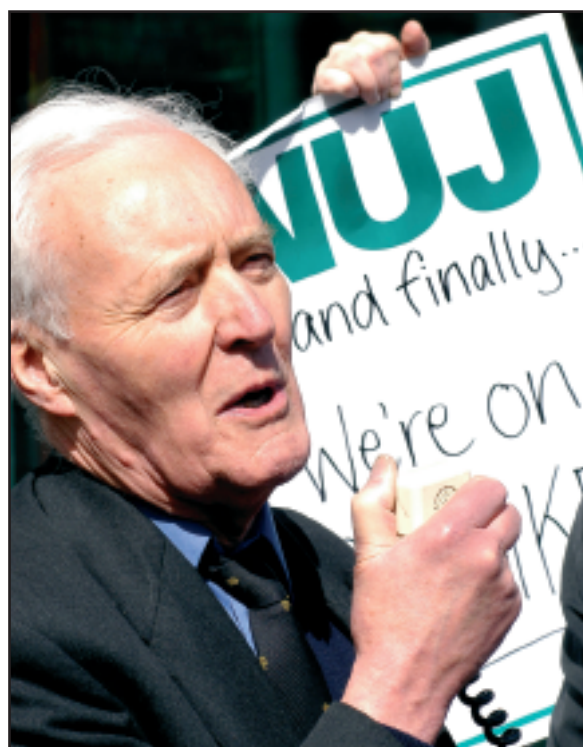
The cuts in local newspapers follow hot on the heels of the BBC's swingeing job cuts, which threaten quality, and last year's attack on local public service broadcasting programming by ITV and the closure of the ITV News Channel. In local authorities consultants are being brought in to replace full-time communications staff resulting

in cost-cutting and the blurring of their public service role.

That's why the NUJ is spearheading a campaign not just to oppose each and every job cut but also to defend quality journalism and secure more resources for editorial - in short, to show journalism matters.

Already the campaign has secured major publicity, forced the Welsh Assembly, Scottish and UK Parliaments to debate the crisis, won the support of councillors and local community groups, gained backing from the TUC and local union branches. Pressure from politicians has resulted in an agreement by DTI minister Gerry Sutcliffe to meet a delegation of activists from the NUJ to explain the impact the crisis is having on journalism and to call for action to stop the profiteering in the industry.

Now we plan to step up the campaign - a national petition will be launched, thousands of leaflets produced, a series of protests and a national tour organised to take our message to the public, the readers,



An independent report by Cardiff University School of Journalism said that "the result of the declining level of investment is that, despite the best efforts from editors and journalists, serious journalism..is under threat".

listeners and viewers, to local community organisations - building an alliance ready, able and willing to act alongside us to defend jobs, quality journalism and the public's right to know.

It is vital every branch and chapel gets involved - find out how on the reverse.

# Democracy under threat

**Tim Lezard**  
President

As journalists, we are increasingly worried by the savage cutbacks in our newsrooms. It's vital we make the public aware just how the cuts will affect them.

Journalists consider our profession as more than just a job: it is a vocation, a calling. We like being the first to know the news, and like the responsibility of passing that information on, as quickly and accurately as we can.

Reporters will spend hours every week talking to local people, getting to know their issues and becoming a trusted, and vital, part of their community. In some cases, levels of trust are built over many years.

But times are changing. Over the last decade, newspaper companies have changed their emphasis from serving the community to making profits. No longer are reporters given time to go out and get stories, to cultivate contacts, to meet the people that make the news.

Instead, accountants have decided a reporter out of the office cannot be writing stories, and therefore is not cost efficient.

So reporters are chained to their desks, ordered to rewrite press releases submitted by large corporations, or to localise a story sent over the wires by national press agencies.

With fewer journalists working on the same number of stories, we cannot put the same time and effort into each story so, inevitably, the quality suffers.

Reporters want the time to research and write stories properly, sub-editors want the time to scrutinise stories, checking for errors and making up witty and succinct headlines, photographers want time to frame and take pictures without having to rush off to the next job, producers want time to put together the best programmes.

Journalists are committed to presenting the news to our readers, listeners and viewers in the best possible manner, but our ability to do our job is getting harder and harder as more pressure is heaped upon us, restricting the public's ability to know what's going on in their community. Without reporters in council chambers, courts, on the streets, asking questions, how will anyone know how their child's school is performing, how clean the local hospital is, how well the local police force is functioning or any other matters on which citizens need information to make informed decisions.

Journalists play a vital role in the community, as democratic watchdogs. Without them, the community is poorer.

*Journalism really does matter.*

# Profiteering

The local newspaper industry is "a £3.1bn advertising medium read by 40 million adults every week" (Source: Newspaper Society). For almost 20 years it has been increasing profitability year on year. Profit margins of the leading companies range between 25 and 35%.

Ownership of the local newspaper industry is increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer ever-more powerful corporations. The three leading companies account for a market share of over 53% whilst the top five account for over 70% of market share. As a result all the leading companies have regional monopolies.

Through their regional monopolies they exert massive influence on the local news agenda and control a significant proportion of the local advertising market.

Over the past few months around 1000 jobs have been lost in the newspaper industry. Employers have argued that due to declining circulations and as a result of falling advertising revenue they have had to make job cuts.

In reality, newspaper companies are making excessive profits. Some are making 40% return on capital and are incredibly profitable (some with a 30% profit margin).

According to the employment figures from the Newspaper Society "readership is growing".

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Some circulation declines have every reason for being. In 2004 advertising spend fell by 5.8%. Advertising sales have fallen for the past 13 years. Some circulation declines are due to growth in use of news services, for example more than 10% of its web operations last year. Advertising on regional

## What the cuts mean

**Trinity Mirror: 230 titles. Market Share 22%. Profit: £150m (the equivalent of around £400,000 profit every single day)**

In recent weeks Trinity Mirror has announced hundreds of redundancies. Among the casualties have been:

**Wales** - The group which owns the Western Mail and Echo is to cut more than 40 jobs, including 10 editorial jobs. In 2004, the Western Mail and Echo Group made nearly £20m with a profit margin of 35.5%. In Wales, Trinity Mirror's market share stands at 42%. The Western Mail saw its circulation grow by 4.1% last year. **Scotland** - more than 40 jobs are being cut at the Daily Record/Sunday Mail and 22 at the Scottish Mirror which will transfer production to London. **Newcastle** - 15 jobs are to go. The Saturday Sports paper, The Pink, has been closed. **Midlands** - 53 staff will be axed, including 14 editorial staff. Around 10% of editorial jobs in Birmingham will be cut or have been left unfilled. Dozens of jobs are to go in other titles including more than 40 at The Mirror, six editorial jobs will go in Liverpool and two in Huddersfield.

**Newsquest: 216 titles. Market Share 16%. Profit \$2.15bn (Gannett)**

Have announced the merger of titles in the North-east of England. 25 sub-editors are under threat at titles in Colchester and Basildon as subbing desks are merged. Newsquest York are expected to announce around 15 job cuts and close one edition. Hundreds more job losses are expected over the next six months. Dozens of vacancies already exist due to the company's 'vacancy management' (recruitment freeze) programme. In Scotland between 60 and 70 staff are to be axed at the Glasgow Herald, Evening Times and Sunday Herald.

**Northcliffe: 113 titles. Market Share 13.2%. Profit £172.2m**

Late last year the company announced a programme ironically called Aim Higher - dubbed Aim Fire! - a £30m cuts package designed to prepare the group for sale. Since then they have announced the loss of around 20 jobs at Gloucester. They plan to close the office in Gloucester

# threatens local news

companies which were  
fits (some individual titles are  
n investment) are still  
most are still making up to

employers' organisation the  
regional press readership

l said in a report published in  
sales by volume of local  
y 4% over the past 4 years and  
s will benefit from favourable  
ver the coming years and  
confidence in future

pend in the regional press grew  
pend has increased every year

ine can be explained by the  
paper websites. Trinity Mirror  
n doubled the revenue from  
t year. Online recruitment  
al press websites as a whole

more than doubled in the past two years. (Source:  
Advertising Association Yearbook Data 2005).  
This is not an industry in crisis. No major newspaper  
groups are making a loss. Average profitability of UK  
companies according to the CBI is around 10%. The  
newspaper industry remains one of the UK's most  
successful and profitable industries.

## SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

As private companies newspaper groups are of  
course free to make cuts in response to adverse  
market conditions. What is different about this cuts  
programme is that it is being carried out in one of  
the most profitable industries in the UK.  
The cuts are being carried out by newspaper groups  
who take huge sums of money out of the local  
economy to reward shareholders who are  
increasingly demanding higher returns year on year.  
Companies are forced into short-term decisions in  
order to avoid being taken over in an increasingly  
dog-eat-dog industry with little or no regulation. As  
a result newspapers are being seriously damaged -  
in some cases their long-term future is in jeopardy.

## WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

Whilst the impact varies across titles there are a  
number of common trends.

- As a result of there being less staff local  
coverage will suffer. Some events will not be  
covered, others will be covered less well. As a  
result of lower staffing levels pagination is  
being cut - therefore there will be less space  
to cover local events.
- Merger of desks/departments mean there will  
be less localised coverage and less knowledge  
of local areas.
- Fewer editions mean late breaking news will  
be lost or localised content will be reduced.
- Job cuts among specialists mean there will be  
a loss of skills/expertise. For example,  
Newcastle will now no longer have a rugby  
correspondent, Gloucester a health  
correspondent.
- Fewer pages and less local coverage will lead to  
fewer readers - in turn leading to further cuts.  
Many fear more cuts to come in local papers  
with the likely closure and merger of some titles.

## : group by group

(leaving just two reporters in a city of 110,000 people) and merge teams with the paper in  
Cheltenham. The local Saturday sports paper has already been shut. In Bristol, Northcliffe are  
planning to axe 36 jobs through merger of sport, features, subbing, photographic and reporting  
functions at the Bristol Evening Post and Western Morning News. In Bath four sub-editor jobs  
have been cut and subs relocated from Wells and Clevedon with a loss of skills and expertise.  
Other job cuts have already been announced in Kent and Stoke.

### Johnston Press: 283 titles. Market Share 16%. Profit £177.2m

The press at Scarborough has been closed with the loss of 12 jobs, meaning the titles -  
including the Scarborough Evening News - are to be printed 95 miles away. This means  
deadlines having to be brought forward with the effect that late breaking news now cannot  
be covered in the paper.

### Archant: 80 titles. Market Share 4.4%. Profit: £32m

One third (17) of the sub-editors are to be sacked at the company's titles in Norfolk. Up  
to 60 staff could also see their pay cut. The journalists at the company were banned from  
placing a paid-for ad in their own paper alerting the public to the threat posed by the cuts.  
Part of the ad read: "Firm with £32m profits to axe staff... pay cuts also threatened. It's  
not a very nice headline is it?"

### Guardian Media Group: Market Share 4%

Despite making £32m profit last year the Manchester Evening News announced 35 editorial job  
cuts - 27 of them journalists, including all of the staff photographers. This represents 22.3% of  
the company's journalists. The likely impact is that at least one edition will be closed, one of  
the weekly titles may be closed, journalists' hours will be changed, the features and news subs  
desks will be merged and the local magazine, V, may be closed.

As a result of the regional monopolies local  
advertisers and local business are losing out. Year  
by year regional monopolies get bigger and more  
powerful. They are abusing their dominant position  
in local markets.

## EXECUTIVE PAY

Not everybody in the industry is suffering. Trinity  
Mirror chief executive Sly Bailey earned a salary of  
£550,000 plus a bonus of £495,000 last year.  
Newsquest Chief Executive Paul Davidson earned  
£399,700 in 2003. Johnston Press CEO Tim Bowdler  
secured a package of £772,000 in 2004.  
Shareholder dividends and executive reward have  
increased dramatically in recent years. Northcliffe  
Newspapers made it clear that its 25% profit levels  
were as much as could be achieved  
without damaging the quality of the papers. Yet  
shareholders are still demanding more. All  
media commentators are agreed - you cannot  
keep making cuts in editorial staff without  
damaging quality.

The local newspaper industry is being damaged by  
the excessive profiteering of major corporations  
driven by short-term shareholder greed. As a result,  
local communities are losing out, local democracy  
suffers. MPs should be calling for a proper  
investigation into profiteering and to what steps  
can be taken to encourage greater diversity of  
ownership in the local media. Only then can the  
local press fulfil its important watchdog role.

# Ofcom fails public as ITV puts profits before programmes

The decision to axe the ITV News Channel was greeted with despair by staff who had worked tirelessly to ensure the under-resourced station could compete with News 24 and Sky News.

But the decision was greeted with cheers on the stock market as ITV's shares rose again.

For staff across ITV it was a case of the same old story.

Last year ITV lobbied the regulator Ofcom to allow it to ditch parts of its public service broadcasting commitment. Ofcom agreed. Staff were axed, programmes were cut, studios closed down, budgets were slashed and hours set aside for regional programming were reduced. ITV shares rocketed and its senior managers pocketed a handsome reward.

The real losers were staff and viewers. Popular regional programmes were moved to graveyard slots to make way for cheap, formulaic programmes which can attract the highest advertising revenue. ITV plc sees its public service duty as a cost instead of a benefit on which it should build and invest.

Ofcom says its will require ITV to maintain a 'core regional news service' - but few believe it will be prepared to stand up to the financial clout of ITV when it comes calling for the next round of cuts. The only chance we have is to build a campaign to defend quality journalism and regional programming alongside the viewers who have shown time and time again they value the service we provide.

## Consultants corrupt public service role

The union's Public Relations and Information Industrial Council (PRIIC) is to launch a campaign to expose the increasing role of private sector consultants in delivering public service communications.

Press and communications officers from across local authorities have hit out at the corruption of their role by consultants who in order to win public sector contracts are becoming too politicised.

With journalists being placed on short-term contracts it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to speak out - so the union is stepping in to campaign for decent terms and conditions for staff as a prerequisite of being able to meet public service duties.

## How to get involved

- Organise a meeting with your local MP/councillors/community groups to explain the impact of cuts in your local media. Let us know the details. We can supply speakers as part of the national tour.
- Order copies of the national petition. Circulate them to local community groups/trade unions and others.
- Order copies of the national briefing pack giving facts and figures about the impact of the cuts. Use the pack to write to MPs, councillors and others putting the union's case.
- Order copies of the national leaflet - or better still produce a tailored one - and organise a branch activity in the town/city centre
- Organise a public meeting to explain to readers, listeners, viewers the impact of the cuts
- Invite the editor/managing editor to a meeting to explain the cuts
- Get your branch to organise a protest/lobby at an event sponsored/organised by any company carrying out cuts in your area
- Try to get other local media interested in the campaign. Seek opportunities to raise the issue through letters/phone-ins etc.
- Get local celebrities/MPs/Councillors to make statements in support of the campaign
- Feed back information to the Campaigns and Communications Department so we can pass on details to other branches/chapels.

To order material, get more information and keep up to date email [taniac@nuj.org.uk](mailto:taniac@nuj.org.uk), telephone 020 7843 3728 or see [www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)