

Book Branch News

NUJ Book Branch

www.nujbook.org

February 2009

Diary Dates

3 February

Branch meeting
(These are held at
Headland House.)
"PAY TALKS"

3 March

Branch meeting
"STATE OF THE
INDUSTRY"

7 April

Branch meeting

Book Branch Chapels

A & C Black
BCA (Book Club
Associates)
Faber & Faber*
HarperCollins (London)
LexisNexis Butterworths*
Lippincott Williams &
Wilkins
Lonely Planet
Macmillan (Oxford)*
Open University
(Milton Keynes)*
Orion*
Penguin/DK*
Random House*
Taylor & Francis Books*
Usborne*

* = Recognized

Book Branch News

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BBN Deadline

Please send chapel news
and other items for the
next issue to
editor@nujbook.org by
2 February

General Secretary Jeremy
Dear in the chair



Jobs Summit

Sylvia Courtnage provides a flavour
of the fighting mood...

180 NUJ activists gathered in London at the end of January to thrash out a strategy to protect jobs. Demand to attend the conference had been so great that the venue had had to be changed at three days' notice. President, James Doherty said that attendees represented every part of the country and every sector of the union. "After two decades of excessive profiteering, we have to send the message that our industry is not dead."

Speakers included investigative journalist Nick Davies, author of *Flat Earth News* and Michael Klehm from the German journalists' union, who spoke in the opening session on: "Why journalism matters - the context for the cutbacks" alongside Deputy General Secretary, Michelle Stanistreet.

Nick Davies said: "Why conceal what goes on in our profession? My book attacks the big lie that they can cut staff levels and resources without damaging the quality of news... We need to be clear about the solution. Other countries use public funds to save news media. The Dutch have set up a state commission to get money into the media. . .if we fight we can win and save quality news." Michael Klehm explained about the first strike which had taken place in a German TV station when the company decided to close one of its two offices and transfer all staff from Berlin to the other office in Munich. While they offered 250 jobs, they expected only 10% of staff to move. There was a successful strike with between 500 – 600 out

on the street.

The situation in Germany was difficult as only about 20% of staff in media companies were union members and young people were not "union friendly".

Michael asked everyone in the hall to stand up – which they did. He said: "You see it is very easy to stand up and fight for your rights."

Michelle Stanistreet, the last speaker in the session, said: "We need to turn doom and gloom into anger and action." Speakers from the floor

included David Crouch, FoC at

the Financial Times [see report of their meeting elsewhere. Ed], who said they had been flooded with messages of support. "Three months ago, the management tried to close the library. There was horror throughout the building! Staff signed a petition and we stopped that. We were able to tap into that anger."

Gina Armstrong said that she worked in a big open-plan office where entire departments had been shut down. "They used to talk of a paperless office. We will soon have a people-less office!"

Workshops

Next there was a choice of three workshop sessions on:

- community campaigning – winning support for quality journalism;
- using the law and other procedures to fight cutbacks; and
- challenging cutbacks at work

I attended the latter which seemed most relevant to Branch and Chapel members. Jenny Lennox led the session and introduced Tony Kelly from York and Alan McFadden from Newsquest Darlington.

Tony quoted: "We have nothing to fear, but fear." He then used the initials to explain: FINDING OUT about your rights/gauging the mood of the chapel.

ENGAGE – meet regularly, up to two or three times a week if necessary. Involve everyone by sharing out the work eg producing posters, placards and leaflets.

INFORMATION – Post all the letters of support on the web. Communicate – use your contacts, explain why you're on strike and

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Book Branch Website

www.nujbook.org

Freelance Rates

www.nujbook.org/freelance/freeln01.shtml

NUJ Freelance Directory and Rate for the Job

www.londonfreelance.org.uk

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invite councillors/other Trade Unionists and local media to the picket line. They produced a strike paper daily explaining their campaign and collected signatures for a petition against cuts in quality.

RAISED AWARENESS – the action had empowered members. They had developed a much stronger bond through the campaign and now knew that they were not alone. Alan gave a great account of the dispute at the Northern Echo, which had negotiated down the number of redundancies but not avoided three compulsory job cuts. He said: "It showed management that we were a force to be reckoned with – and it showed us, too!"

John Toner, in the following session on fighting freelance cutbacks, urged chapels to put in claims asking the company to keep the freelance budget intact and to involve freelancers in the chapels where they could. Reed Business Information had had some success and freelancers were now seen there as a subject for 'consultation'.

Future Strategy

At the close of the conference, General Secretary, Jeremy Dear, in moving a motion on strategy, unanimously endorsed by the National Executive, said: "Obama's election has highlighted a lack of originality in headline writing "Yes we can" etc. I don't know if he can deliver what he's promised. But if we don't fight, everything will get worse."

Book Branch Minutes

5 August 2008

Invited speaker: Jacqui Smith, Head of Communications and Fundraising of Bookaid International.

Workplace reports: ORION chapel successfully negotiated reorganisation of workloads following redundancies. PENGUIN/DK chapel put pay negotiations into dispute. RANDOM HOUSE campaigning to achieve transparent grading system.

September and October meetings inquorate.

4 November

Endorsed actions of two previous meetings where necessary, especially admission of new members.

Plans made for special December meeting, to be advertised as 'The NUJ Revealed: mini workshop and winter

A recent dream headline had appeared on a commercial website: "Management backs down as they bow to NUJ demands."

"I am excited by the idea of members occupying offices and fighting together – we need to move from individual fights to more co-ordinated action. We will back any action that our members take in defence of their jobs." (Loud applause)

The motion on fighting the cuts was passed unanimously at the close of the meeting. The motion (which is 2.5 pages long) opened: "This meeting condemns the latest round of job and budget cuts in profitable media companies...."

"This meeting believes the excessive profiteering and poor management – in some cases demanding returns of up to 40% and pushing the companies into significant debt – have left companies unable to cope with the current advertising downturn or structural changes happening in the industry. This meeting condemns the policy of making staff pay for such management failures and executive rewards through widespread redundancies and pay freezes...."

Throughout the day, members talked about their direct experience of taking action and it was fascinating to hear some of the tactics employed.

The whole day was a great inspiration and ideas from it will probably be discussed at Branch and Chapel meetings for many months.

social. Committee to stuff envelopes for full membership mailing at their next meeting.

2 December

Mini workshop conducted by Caroline Holmes, who gave a brief, lively and informative talk about the structure of the union and how individual members fit into it. Participants came up with ideas for increasing attendance at branch meetings.

Brief business meeting followed to admit new members and deal with motion, all passed. Book Branch agrees;

- 1) the expenditure of £30.55 for refreshments for branch social on 30 September.
- 2) to sponsor up to three delegates to the Latin American Conference on 6 December, at cost of £10/£6 each.
- 3) the expenditure of up to £100 for the evening's meeting.

Quality in Publishing meeting

Anna Wagstaff of Oxford Branch, which had been instrumental in organising the meeting, which took place last September, said:

"It did go well. We had a phenomenal turnout. There must have been more than a hundred people in that room. This surely shows that issues of quality are now a major concern in this area of publishing."

Many chapels were present, although centring on those in the Oxford area. These included representatives from T&F, Pearson, and Macmillan, OUP and Wiley (Oxford). Those from further afield came from workplaces in Chichester and Harlow. The speaker had done his homework, and most of what he said was written on his powerpoint presentation, a copy of which we have and will make available -- maybe post it on the book part of the NUJ website.

The meeting agreed that as a next step a website should be set up where editorial and design staff can submit anecdotal evidence on issues of quality, so that we can piece together a picture of what is really going on in educational and academic publishing in this country. Steve Ball from the Oxford Brookes International Centre for Publishing Studies, who spoke at the meeting, has got agreement for the Oxford Brookes Centre to host such a site and is in the process of setting it up.

A number of those who attended the 'quality' meeting have found the opportunity to raise this issue with colleagues and managers at their place of work. Some managers appear receptive to the idea of inviting Steve Ball to make similar presentations to their staff. These sorts of meetings could offer a valuable opportunity to address specific concerns as well as helping foster a cultural change in which decisions on production processes explicitly take into account the impact on quality.

Steve Ball's presentation was, to my knowledge, unique -- there is nothing similar available at this time. We are in the process of producing a double-sided A4 summing up the key points. I will circulate pdfs once this has been done and would be happy to make copies available to anyone who can make use of them. In addition, Steve Ball has kindly agreed to allow us to post his powerpoint presentation on the web, once he's made a few changes.

Encouraging relevant people to submit serious anecdotes -- and there are enough of them around -- could also be a useful thing for chapels to get stuck into. If and when we get something off the ground, there could be scope for organising a meeting to promote this among London based academic/professional and educational publishing houses.

Anna Wagstaff
Secretary, Oxford and District NUJ branch

Homeworkers Worldwide: Mitzi Bales reports on a case for unionism

The huge workforce of mostly women homeworkers, estimated at many millions throughout the world, are generally paid by the piece at a rate that works out well below average earnings wherever they live.

They generally have no fringe benefits whatever -- sick pay, pensions, holidays, maternity leave -- nor do they have health and safety protection, though sometimes doing precarious work. Added to poor pay and poor conditions, their employment is irregular.

Given their isolation and often remoteness in their own homes, they are seldom members of a union while needing the protection and representation that trade unionism affords. But change is happening. Fortunately, some new forms of organising have been developed by trade unions, which holds some promise for this exploited group of workers.

In India, for example, two large women's trade unions have organised thousands of homeworkers. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), based in Gujarat, operates in two ways: fighting for recognition and rights for homeworkers and, at the same time, developing cooperatives to promote collective organising and create employment. The Working Women's Forum (WWF) is located in Chennai. Both are registered trade unions and, in addition to traditional union activities, provide savings and credit, healthcare and childcare programmes.

The Union of Embroidery Workers (SIBTTA) in Madeira has included homeworkers in its membership since the 1970s and works to improve their conditions through campaigns and tripartite agreements with the regional government and local employers. New homeworker trade unions have been set up in Santiago, Concepcion and several coastal towns in Chile. These are now affiliated with a national trade union federation.

What has happened in the UK? There is a long history of campaigning for rights for homeworkers, one progressive result of which is their inclusion in the minimum wage legislation. The National Group on Homeworking (NGH) supports homeworkers in employment tribunals and continues to campaign for improvement in the minimum wage.

The Homeworkers Worldwide is headquartered in Leeds. For more information or to give a donation, contact: info@homeworkersworldwide.org.uk or write to: Jane Tate, Homeworkers Worldwide, Office 20, 30 Dock Street, Leeds LS11 7DX.

WRITERS WANTED!

BBN is your forum for news and views.

Let's make it lively!

Do you have a gripe? Want to say thanks for help?

Have you some ideas to share on union policy?

Please send your contributions or article ideas to me at: sylvia.courtnage@lexisnexis.co.uk

Sylvia Courtnage
Editor

Protest rally overflows from Financial Times canteen

Journalists at the Financial Times in London crammed into the canteen on Thursday 22 January, for a rousing rally against job cuts demanded by owners Pearson plc. More than 150 members of the 220-strong NUJ chapel heard the veteran Labour politician and NUJ member Tony Benn appeal for a common cause among working people against the ravages of the market that are inflicting job cuts across the UK economy. At the FT, managers want 80 redundancies, among them 20 journalists – even though the pink paper is still highly profitable.

Acting Father of the NUJ chapel David Crouch pointed out that according to the latest company figures it made £35,000 profit for every single employee. Tony – who said he joined the NUJ 60 years ago – recalled the slump of the 1930s, adding that it led to a revival of progressive politics and the UK Labour government that brought in a great advance in public services in the late 1940s.

He said the same could happen in a new resurgence of democracy after the current recession.

Tony added: "Democracy transfers power from the market place to the polling station. From the wallet to the ballot."

Addressing an editorial workforce that reports the banking and finance industry in depth, he added: "Banking is far too important to be left to gamblers. There is an audience now for sensible things that will help people rebuild our society."

The rally was part of an NUJ day of action that saw leafleting and lobbying by union members. Ten new members were recruited to the union. The canteen was so crowded that some members could not get in and had to listen from outside the doors.

The crowd included union reps from fellow Pearson chapels at Penguin Books and Pearson Education in Oxford who expressed their solidarity with newspaper colleagues.

The action at the FT is part of a union-wide campaign against media cutbacks.

This article is reproduced from the NUJ website – www.nuj.org.uk

IMPORTANT NOTICE
BRANCH MEETING ON PAY
Tuesday 3 February, 6.30pm

Headland House, 308 Gray's Inn Road WC1
(nearest tube Kings Cross)
Light refreshments provided.

Chapel report

LexisNexis chapel is working hard on recruitment in the run-up to submitting our next pay claim. Aside from ongoing efforts, we have started holding drop-in sessions at different sites across the company. In January we made a first visit to Woking where our IT services are based – although there are quite a few eligible staff there.

Huw Davies (Branch Chair and Chapel Learning Rep) and Sylvia Courtnege (Joint MoC) travelled to Woking with supplies of literature, NUJ pens and mugs. Posters advertising the event had been displayed around the building, and members of staff were invited to drop in over lunchtime to find out more about the union.

The relaxed atmosphere meant that there was plenty of time to chat. We spoke to one new member, signed up another two and also referred another staff member, who worked purely in IT, to Unite (formerly Amicus).

One member based at Woking said that the visit had put the NUJ on the map there – and no-one could any longer claim that the union did not pay them any attention.

The chapel hopes to organise further 'surgeries' both at Woking and other sites including the Croydon office.

Health guide

Help from the TUC for workplace safety reps

A new TUC guide entitled *Occupational health: dealing with the issues to train workplace representatives*, can help safety reps learn about all the aspects of occupational health. This includes stress – not unknown in the publishing industry; slips and trips – which can happen in any work environment; illness and pain from lifting injuries, and noise-induced hearing loss, among other problems leading to ill health.

The HSE figures show that two million workers are made sick, are injured, or have illnesses made worse by their work every year.

The guide helps safety reps to assess the extent of ill health in their workplaces and to work towards making the work environment healthier.