

newspaper

www.nujpr.org.uk

LOBBYING INQUIRY GETS GOING

■ In June 2007 the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee launched an inquiry into lobbying – looking into the transparency of the industry, recent attempts at self-regulation, and whether or not the rules for those in government should be changed. The NUJ has submitted evidence, as has Spinwatch and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. (Details of the NUJ evidence may be found on our web site at: www.nujpr.org.uk)

The Inquiry's first oral session kicked off with evidence from three MPs: John Grogan (Labour), Peter Luff (Conservative) and Stephen Pound (Labour).

John Grogan MP has been instrumental in pushing the debate on transparency in the UK in order to 'bring it out of the shadows'. He has also been working with the industry to create a more robust self-regulatory system. In May last year, he joined forces

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Branch report

THE STRUGGLES CONTINUE



2007 has been a year to remember for Press and PR Branch.

While the union nationally celebrated its 100th anniversary, we celebrated our 50th.

A considerable achievement for our pioneers and their successors, sometimes against the challenge of other journalists who questioned the right of PRs even to be members of the NUJ.

Well, we won and we're still here. And PR members have continued to play a leading role in the NUJ in struggles protecting the individual rights of members at work, developing professional training courses, encouraging more members to become lay representatives and, above all, providing a warm and welcoming meeting space in which members can share their ideas and experiences.

Central to this have been our branch meetings. Amongst the issues discussed have been the savage job cuts at the BBC and in the independent sector. As well as the direct

assault on colleagues rights, the undermining of regional and specialist programming threatens our ability as PR professionals to communicate directly and effectively the key issues we are employed to publicise and promote.

This has nothing to do with spin. In fact, two of the best discussions at branch meetings in the past year have concerned the damage done to our profession by the increasing politicisation of all government PR.

The drip-drip effect of this is to undermine the ability of all of us to transmit information openly, honestly and accurately to the media in the hope of being reported fairly. That's the message we will also be giving to the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee in 2008.

This dovetails with the NUJ's national campaign to make journalism matter. In the end a Grub Street media produces a Grub Street democracy. The ease with which most of the mainstream media has slid into acceptance

of draconian attacks on civil liberties and rubbish stories about migration should fill us with alarm. This is of particular relevance to PR members, many working in the charitable and public sectors, who are dealing with the detrimental consequences of the negative stereotypes such 'stories' produce.

For the year ahead I have a simple wish list:

- give individual members every support we can in their workplace
- encourage more members to take advantage of professional training courses, including those which enable them to develop the skills to represent other members
- recruit and retain members
- win more workplace recognition agreements and strengthen linking agreements where these exist with other unions
- make our voice loud, proud and heard inside and outside the union, whether this be on pay, conditions, standards or civil liberties, nationally and internationally.

Mick Gosling
Branch Chair

AGM KICKS OFF NEW YEAR

■ The branch annual general meeting takes place on Wednesday 9 January from 6.30pm at NUJ headquarters.

It's a formal meeting to consider the chair's annual report; a report from Charles Harkness our treasurer; the election of branch officers and auditors and any motions. A copy of the agenda will be posted on the branch web site before Christmas, and if you wish to submit any motions, please email them to me by 26 December.

The normal January branch meeting follows the AGM. This will consider our motions and others submitted for the annual delegate conference in April.

In addition we will also be appointing our branch delegation of six to go to Belfast (3-5 April 2008). If you are interested in going to the conference and want to know more about it, give me a ring and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Look forward to seeing you on 9 January.

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Branch meetings

All on a Wednesday
9 January AGM
followed by branch
meeting; 13 February;
5 March; 9 April; 7
May; 4 June; 2 July
branch outing;
August no meeting; 3
September; 1 October;
5 November and 3
December

All meetings start at
6.30pm running to
no later than 8.30pm
(refreshments available)
and are held at NUJ,
308 Gray's Inn Road,
London WC1.

The nearest
tube/station is
Kings Cross/St Pancras.

Alan Johnston to lead Media Freedom Conference

Alan Johnston, former BBC correspondent in Gaza, recently held hostage, will speak on the problems of reporting conflict at a major NUJ conference, 'New Threats to Media Freedom – how we fight back' on 26 January.

Building on the success of the union's Journalism Matters campaign, the conference, sponsored by NUJ London Freelance Branch, is aimed at journalists, broadcasters, media campaigners, media students and academics.

Sessions will cover the mounting political and commercial pressures on journalists, the crisis at the BBC, secrecy and censorship, and bias in war reporting.

Alan Johnston will lead a line-up of speakers including Martin Bright, political editor of the New Statesman; BBC Newsnight correspondent Paul Mason, Peter Wilby, former editor of the Independent on Sun-



day, Heather Brooke, specialist on the Freedom of Information Act and Jo Glanville of Index on Censorship.

How media unions around the world are resisting controls and defending standards will be covered in presentations by NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear, Chris Frost of the NUJ Ethics Council, BECTU president Tony Lennon and leader of the International Federation of Journalists Aidan White

The conference is being organised with the support of the

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF). It will take place on Saturday 26 January 2008 from 9.30am-4.30pm at NUJ headquarters, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

The Branch meeting on 5 December (which was not quorate) asked that details be circulated in the January branch news and that any member interested in attending contact Barry the branch secretary. There will be a further chance to discuss the conference at the branch meeting on Wednesday 9 January 2008.

To register for the conference send cheque for £10 payable to 'NUJ London Freelance Branch' to CPBF 23 Orford Road, London E17 9NL. The registration fee, for those signing up in advance, includes lunch.

Registration also available on the day.

Further details on the CPBF web site: www.cpbff.org.uk

Inquiry into lobbying gets underway

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with the Association of Professional Parliamentary Consultants (APPC) to encourage the 20-25 per cent of the lobbying industry firms, that currently refuse to participate in self-regulation, to sign up to the recognised codes of conduct.

Giving evidence, Peter Luff MP, a former lobbyist at Good Relations, repeatedly took the industry line. In his written evidence to the Committee, he accused the APPC of seeking to 'promote concern about this issue (of transparency in lobbying) with a view to enhancing the commercial prospects of its own members.'

Stephen Pound MP was called because he once said that: '...lobbying is the most flagrant waste of money in modern politics'. The suggestion being that the problem with lobbying was not that it's too influential, but that much of it is ineffectual.

This hearing, which lasted for about ninety minutes, was very much a 'scene setter'.

The Committee will start hearing verbal evidence from those who had made written submissions in the New Year. It is due to report its findings in late summer 2008

by Tamasin Cave (Spinwatch) and Barry White

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Make a date for 9 January
– our first branch meeting of
the year – you could enjoy it!

