

Nudge Nudge

NUJ Daily Express, Sunday Express, Daily Star and Daily Star Sunday chapel newsletter

10 April 2004

Here we go again

BUT THIS TIME, WE SAY 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH'

For the third time in as many years, the management is proposing to slash costs across the titles by axing staff and pooling copy.

Despite repeated assurances over the past year that the proprietor is committed to investing in the long-term future of the papers, yet again a new cull is proposed.

At a meeting on April Fools Day – but this is no joke – Paul Ashford and Alex Bannister outlined their vision of a pared-down staff and pooled copy across titles, apparently needed because of “embarrassing” sales figures for the Daily Express.

They want to lop a massive £2million from this year's budget, a budget they confessed they knew to be “unrealistic” when they set it four months ago.

Targeted areas include Sport where management claimed some executives reluctantly accept the idea of a pooled reporting team as “the way forward”. Joint-working is also the buzzword for the picture desks.

The axe is also hovering over the City department. The management wants to disband the specialised production team who work on city, Sunday business and personal finance pages and send the work up to Broughton.

These are just some of the bright ideas the management have for ways of tackling a circulation decline. It is the view of the chapel committee that such measures will merely serve to quicken any decline in sales by weakening the quality of the

titles. It is also our view that these measures must be strongly resisted by the chapel.

NUJ national organiser Barry Fitzpatrick said: “We can't just go on accepting the management's short-term arguments for cutting costs at the expense of quality journalism.

“Their latest half-baked ideas have not been talked through, let alone thought through. They are trying to justify doing something when they have signally failed to make a case for it.”

Disturbingly, the secret plans to impose more cuts only came to light after John Maddock – who likes to see himself as Richard Desmond's fixer – called one of our members and arranged to meet him in Bristol Parkway railway station.

He is one of our members whose job would be threatened under these plans. During a phone conversation, Mr Maddock even claimed to be the managing editor. As far as the chapel team is aware, Alex Bannister is the only managing editor.

Any member who is approached and asked to attend meetings in similarly bizarre venues, should politely decline and seek advice from the NUJ.

Mr Fitzpatrick added: “We will not tolerate executives taking it upon themselves to arrange meetings – at stations or at journalists' homes – which seemed designed to intimidate our members.”

THIS CHAPEL CANNOT AND WILL NOT ACCEPT FURTHER CUTBACKS. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

A MANDATORY CHAPEL MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE ON THURSDAY 15 APRIL 3PM IN THE CANTEEN – ALL MEMBERS MUST ATTEND. NON-MEMBERS ALSO WELCOME.