

Nudge Nudge

Daily Express, Sunday Express and Daily Star chapels newsletter

25 January 2002

Give your verdict

Members of the Express and Star chapels voted unanimously on Thursday 24 January 2002 to reject the 1.8% pay offer from the management and to conduct a ballot on whether to stage some form of industrial action to persuade the company to increase the amount of money on offer.

NUJ head office will be sending out ballot forms to all NUJ members next week and it is important that everyone exercises their right to vote – and that includes casuals.

One of the problems for the NUJ is keeping its records up to date so if you think you may not be listed as working for the Daily Express, Sunday Express or Daily Star, please contact the NUJ head office by phone or email.

You can also email Ray.King@express.co.uk or Steve.Usher@DailyStar.co.uk

If you are not a member, you should consider joining as soon as possible. If you fill in a form quickly - preferably today - you can be eligible to vote in the ballot.

About 80 people attended the chapel meeting on Thursday but the postal ballot allows members who were not able to attend to give their verdict.

If members vote to take industrial action, the process gives legal protection to those who take part in it. General Secretary John Foster who attended the meeting explained that the form of industrial action would be decided by the chapel later.

The chapel meeting was told that the management had failed to respond to our request to increase the offer.

We are particularly deserving of a generous rise this year, having suffered the consequences of 135 colleagues being made redundant just over a year ago.

The reduction in staff has helped the management to cut the wage bill by over 20 per cent. At the same time, office space costs have been cut by half.

The management has also saved a large amount of money by failing to provide a canteen during evenings and weekends. A vending machine and microwave has been substituted.

Few of the health and safety issues we have raised have even been looked at. The company has failed to

train any volunteers in first aid, to fulfil their legal obligations.

The company has failed to honour an agreement to draw up starting contracts with the union. It has instead employed staff on £26,000 five-night week contracts to which we are completely opposed. Daily Mail starting salaries (four-night working) are now £37,000. Yet the Express is the only Fleet Street paper where staff work over seven nights of the week.

Daily Star sales are up 14 per cent. TV mags and sticker albums are being produced in addition to national newspapers by existing hard-pressed staff.

In many areas hard-pressed Express and Star journalists are struggling to maintain Fleet Street standards with creaking equipment, unsuitable chairs, and Macs that are too old or underpowered to run software at the speed we need.

Often even our computer mice are missing or defective, increasing the risk of RSI. Working conditions are cramped and often uncomfortable.

Despite this, the company is expecting to make profits of £70million this year, according to Press Gazette on 25 January 2002.

In recognition of your super-human efforts and achievements though, Northern & Shell proposes to raise your salary by nearly £10 per week. (£750 per annum before tax which works out at £500 at most after tax.) Currently there are more than 100 staff who earn less than £30,000.

The management led us to believe that our pay rise would be in line with other national newspapers even though we argued that we deserved a lot more because of our extra productivity.

Yet Daily Mail journalists received rises of 3% plus in October while the Financial Times gave 4%. FT average salaries are now £7,000 higher than the Express and Daily Star.

Journalists at The Times were given a 3.5% rise, the Guardian inflation plus 0.75%, and the Mirror 2%.

Other papers have experienced redundancies but nothing like the scale of the Express and Star. At the Sunday People a few people have been made redundant, while those who remain have been switched from a five-night to a four-night week to compensate.