Beat: Local

NUJ Cumbria strike receives strong local support

NUJ press release

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USPA NEWS - As NUJ members walked out on strike this morning, Thursday 20 December, they have received remarkable cross-party political support and an loud and public appreciation of their work and local quality journalism in Cumbria

Pickets started just after 7am in Workington and Carlisle today. The newspapers affected by the strike are the Carlisle News and Star, the Cumberland News, the Workington Times and Star and the Whitehaven News.

Local politicians have expressed support for local, quality, sustainable journalism:

Rory Stewart, MP for Penrith and the Border, said: "Strong, vigorous local newspapers are a vital part of local democracy. Journalism is extraordinarily important. We will only keep it alive if we reward journalists properly."

Tim Farron, former Lib Dem leader and MP for South Lakeland, said: "Our local reporters here in Cumbria aren't just writing about our communities, they are part of those communities - they are the glue that keeps our community together. That's the key to a good local newspaper. We are lucky to have so many excellent journalists writing for fantastic papers and they deserve to be fairly rewarded for the work that they do."

Labour leader of Cumbria County Council and local Councillor, Stewart Young, said: "Skilled and experienced local journalists are a key part of our democratic structures. Whilst I'll be the first to say they don't always make our lives easy, I'll clarify that by saying nor should they. They disseminate information to the public, organise campaigns, and in the finest examples of work they hold organisations like ours up to public scrutiny. To lose such a crucial link, is a major loss for us all. That is why I support this industrial action taken here today."

Helen Davison, Carlisle Green Party chair, said: "Totally support the strike today. What Newsquest is doing is just wrong. They just not listening. Local journalism is really important for reporting real news's as it happens and highlighting important issues."

Jane Kennedy, NUJ Northern and Midlands organiser, said: “We´ve had a great turnout on the picket lines this morning, people really do care about local journalism because news is a public service, people need to know what is going on in their communities and we all need local, accurate and timely information. Newsquest are making severe cuts again and again; they are slashing front line journalism, jobs and paying out thousands in perks to those at the top of company. Newsquest are systematically asset stripping local journalism in this country and they must be stopped.“

Newsquest is the second largest regional and local newspaper company in the UK and they have made more than a 100 people redundant since taking over Cumbria Newspapers in March 2018. The company is making staff redundant this week and just days before Christmas. There has been no pay rise for journalists at Newsquest Cumbria since 2015 and only 2 pay rises in the last 11 years. In Carlisle trainee reporters start on £16,500, with seniors starting on £20,500. Robert J. Dickey has announced he is retiring as president and chief executive of Newsquest US parent company, Gannett Inc. The official announcement revealed that he will be paid $435,000 (£350,000 at current exchange rates) each month until Tuesday 7 May as part of a transition plan. If he makes it through the five-month transition period then he will then scoop a $1,000,000 (£800,000) jackpot bonus.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com