

## REVEALED: THE SECRETS THAT NUJ LEADERSHIP IS HIDING FROM YOU

Please pass this document to any of your journalist colleagues who have not received this e-mail. They really need to see this one.

### From Mark Watts – the independent journalist for editor of the *Journalist*

I have been astonished by what I've found out about the NUJ during this election. Since declaring my candidacy for the *Journalist* editorship just three weeks ago, I've uncovered what has gone wrong with our union. And I think you'd be appalled too.

This time, I wasn't even looking for a story. I'm just standing as a candidate in the election for the editor of the NUJ's *Journalist*. I believe that I have a really good, clear programme: I want to increase the magazine's frequency; break more stories about our industry, while maintaining the strong features; and launch a proper website. My vision is for a magazine focussed on professional and work-place issues that matter to NUJ members as journalists. Above all, I am unique among the candidates for making clear in my election address that I would ensure that the *Journalist* is independent from any party, including from the NUJ leadership.

But with my experience heading up the investigations unit at *Sunday Business* for four years, in addition to working as an investigative journalist on several other national newspapers and television programmes, including *World in Action*, I guess it was never going to take me long to discover the shocking truth about our union.

So, here's the news...

A political faction that calls itself 'NUJ Left' is trying to take control of the NUJ. I bet you've never even heard of 'NUJ Left'. Don't worry, I hadn't either. I've never seen it mentioned in the *Journalist*. Maybe I missed it. Did you see it?

C4 News presenter Jon Snow last week revealed to a friend helping on my campaign that he had quit the NUJ because of this nonsense. And if Jon, the journalist most respected by other journalists in Britain today, has given up on the NUJ, we're in trouble.

Don't get me wrong, the 'NUJ Left' doesn't have overall control of the national executive council (NEC) – not yet. But that's what they want, and the same applies to other key policy-making bodies in our union. And this election is the key that will enable them to pull it off. They're trying to put their man in charge of the *Journalist*. With that, they'd be in an ideal position to take control of our union completely.

And they're going to succeed, unless you vote. You probably do not realise it, but one of the candidates in this election for editor of the *Journalist* is part of this 'NUJ Left' group. You need to vote in this election to save our union. Do it today.

Right now, this faction controls a big chunk of the NEC and wields heavy influence over its decisions. They do this partly by working, in effect, as a political party, partly by some good old-fashioned tub-thumping. One senior NUJ source told me: 'They just have the loudest voices, and other committee members feel cowed.'

That's why we had that craziness about the NUJ trying to set up a 'political fund', which was booted out by members in a referendum. That's why we had a similar distraction about the NUJ calling for a

boycott of Israeli goods. You probably thought long ago that the NUJ is run by ~~extreme lefties~~, but I bet you didn't know that our union is being subjected to such an organised attempted hijack.

So, what is ~~NUJ Left~~? Several friends of mine have told me that it sounds like just the kind of group to which I would belong. I believe that some people have indeed been lured in by what, to many journalists, would seem an innocuous-sounding group. Ah, they might say to themselves, little, cuddly ~~NUJ Left~~.

Cuddly, it ain't.

They call themselves a ~~coalition~~. Where I come from, we use a different c-word: to my mind, they're a cabal.

According to their own description, ~~NUJ Left~~ provides a focus for broad left activity in the union, which includes, ~~co-ordinating~~ branch activity to propagate NUJ Left aims and objectives, and any agreed policies, across the union.

It also includes: ~~Maintaining~~ regular and effective communication among all levels of the NUJ, including liaison between NUJ Left and NEC Left members, to ensure senior lay and elected left officials are accountable to NUJ Left.

And, crucially for this election, it includes: ~~Identifying~~ and targeting key elected posts and NEC seats, democratically agreeing slates for elections, and campaigning for NUJ Left candidates, to advance our influence and further develop equality representation on policy-making bodies and through other structures of the union.

You can see all this in the ~~about~~ section of the NUJ Left's website: <http://www.nujleft.org/about/>. (Link working at time of writing.)

On the website, they describe themselves as ~~an~~ inclusive coalition of activists in the NUJ who work together to improve conditions for members and advance socialist principles within the union, the labour movement and society at large.

~~We~~ recognise that a vibrant, progressive union, committed to fighting for quality journalism, social justice, peace and equality will only be achieved with a strong left-wing membership base supported by a left leadership.

That was all agreed, apparently, in November last year, according to the website.

The fact that the group is ~~left-wing~~ is irrelevant: a cabal in the NUJ is poisonous regardless of its political hue, extreme or otherwise.

This is clear evidence that ~~NUJ Left~~ is attempting to hijack our union. It is an astonishingly brazen and jackass attempt. In my many years of investigative journalism, I have never known a group of plotters simply to plonk their game-plan onto a website. Let's just say, this ~~NUJ Left~~ crowd are not exactly clever. And yet, we're on the verge of allowing this bunch to take over our union.

And do we need our union right now: it has no shortage of important work to do on behalf of us journalists. It is far too important to leave it to a load of ~~politici~~ studenteschi.

So, here's the problem right now...

One of the candidates in the election for the *Journalist* editorship is from %NUJ Left+. You may have read very carefully all the election material produced by the candidates that accompanies the ballot papers. If so, I hope that you will vote for me on the strength of my ideas for the *Journalist*, together with my breadth and depth of journalistic experience. You may have read just as carefully the e-mail circulars from each of the candidates that have been sent via the NUJ. But it doesn't matter how many times you read all this material, no candidate mentions being part of %NUJ Left+.

That's a problem because many voters rely solely on this material to make their voting decisions.

But you may have gone a bit further and taken the trouble to search out all the candidates' campaign websites, and you may have really carefully read every single word published there as well. But you're still none-the-wiser, are you?

And maybe you read all the candidates' statements published on other websites:

1. LFB <http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/journalist-candidates.html>
2. *Press Gazette* <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=44435&c=1>
3. *Hold the Front Page* <http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/news/091006journalisted.shtml>

Still no clue?

There's a good reason for that. He doesn't mention that he's the %NUJ Left+ candidate in any of these places, including his campaign website (at the time of writing). Yes, he's a he. So out of eight candidates, you've narrowed it down to just seven possibles.

But why's he quite so bashful about his %NUJ Left+ comrades? Could it possibly, conceivably be because he knows full well that it would deter many of you from voting for him?

Well, as you may have gathered, I'm not so bashful. The "NUJ Left" candidate is Richard Simcox <http://richsimcox.co.uk>. You have a right to know.

Mind you, if you'd turned to page 15 of last week's *Socialist Worker*, you would in fact have found out: <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=19223>. What, not one your regular newspapers?

Oh well, if you'd chanced upon the homepage of the website of %NUJ Left+, you also would have known: <http://www.nujleft.org> (Link working at time of writing). But, of course, you weren't likely to have stumbled upon that website. After all, you had a mass of information sent to you from the candidates via the NUJ. You weren't meant to see that website, of course. Otherwise, it would have been mentioned somewhere in all that material. The website is aimed at helping the %NUJ Left+ rally its hardcore politicised %activist+ vote.

I'm told that %NUJ Left+ can count on 400 hardcore votes in this election. Seems piddling, no? But, they'd get their man in if the turnout is as low as expected. And if the *Journalist* effectively falls under the control of %NUJ Left+, it'd be much easier for this faction to fulfil its aims, as quoted above. In essence, they'd be able to take control of our union.

That is why rank-and-file NUJ members, working in all sectors, in all parts of Britain and Ireland, must vote. If you don't, the NUJ will be lost to us, the members . for ever. This is your final chance. I had no idea about this when I decided to stand for the *Journalist* editorship, but this election is about more than that one job. This election is about all of us as journalists.

And that's pretty much what I told Jon Snow last week. He replied by giving what might best be described as a knowing reaction. His message was simple enough: %left the NUJ over the absurd

Israel boycott concocted by another union clique. I support the Watts campaign. It is time members voted for a truly independent journalists' union. +<http://www.foiacentre.com/news-NUJ-Journalist-editor-endorsements03.html>

My election campaign has already brought the existence of %NUJ Left+ to somewhat wider attention <http://www.foiacentre.com/FOIA-news.html>. I see that a %Simon Chapman+ last Tuesday raised some of these points about %NUJ Left+ in a comment on their website, saying that it appears to be operating like a political party within the NUJ. I don't know who this person is.

Someone responds on behalf of %NUJ Left+, saying: %The group is certainly not a political party, nor does it operate like one.

%None of this is secret. In fact, we have made a point of conducting ourselves as openly as we can. Have you been reading NUJ Active lately? There's [sic] been notes there on our activities. You ask: how many NUJ members know the Left group exists? I wish more did. We encourage people to join at every opportunity.

%We are not a cabal. We model ourselves on similar democratic, above-board organisations in other unions, from the FBU and postal workers union to UNITE and many more. +<http://www.nujleft.org/2009/10/vote-richard-simcox-for-journalist-editor/#comments>

If so, that is a troubling suggestion for the wider trade union movement. But, at least now, you know about %NUJ Left+. Wasn't so difficult was it? Of course, you would've known already if Simcox had mentioned it in his e-mail circular to NUJ members, or taken all those other opportunities to tell you.

On Simcox's site last Saturday, %Simon Chapman+ also raised similar issues in a comment on one story. Simcox replied: %NUJ Left believes in the election of union officials and their accountability . as do I. If elected, I'd support and be accountable to the entire membership and if they don't like the job I do they'd have the chance to boot me out in five years. +<http://richsimcox.co.uk/news/put-freelances-at-the-heart-of-nuj/>

Just maybe the membership would have liked to have had the chance this time to decide whom to elect on the basis of all the key information.

For the avoidance of doubt, I'm not a member of any political party and have no political affiliation whatsoever. In general, I believe that no one should be under any obligation to declare her or his political allegiance. However, if you stand for office as, for example, a councillor, MP or MEP, you're expected to declare any political allegiances. Imagine the uproar if a candidate standing as an independent in such an election were discovered to be part of some party.

Why should it be different for a trade union that is supposed to be democratically governed?

This should certainly apply to a candidate's allegiance with any kind of political grouping that organises itself in the union. I know only of %NUJ Left+ that currently fits that description. But it should also apply even to political groups that do not organise themselves within the union. There's no legal requirement for this, but it's necessary in fairness to the electorate and in the interests of our union's democracy.

Just think about the principle for a minute. Imagine if a candidate had stood in this election, or stands in any future NUJ election, who omits to make clear in material sent to the electorate any political affiliation. Let's imagine she or he presents a good case. Let's say, for sake of argument, that she or he wins. Then you find out that the person you've just elected into an NUJ position is a member of the BNP. What, you're going to hope that I'm one of the candidates, that I find out just in time and find the

necessary proof, and bring it all to your attention? I am not comparing %NUJ Left+with the BNP. I am saying the NUJ membership has the right to know if a candidate is a member of %NUJ Left+, the BNP, or any other political group . especially for a job such as the *Journalist* editorship.

JEREMY DEAR and MICHELLE STANISTREET

I know Jeremy Dear, our general secretary, and Michelle Stanistreet, our deputy general secretary, quite well. While I have made clear that, if I were the *Journalist* editor, I would ensure the magazine's independence, including from the NUJ %leadership+, I am happy to be open about the fact that I like Jeremy and Michelle, that I have a high regard for them, and believe that they have done fantastic work for NUJ members in their current, and previous, roles. They have the potential to lead our union to a better future.

I call on our general secretary and deputy general secretary to condemn publicly the stated aims of %NUJ Left+. I call on them to condemn publicly the fielding of a candidate by %NUJ Left+in this election in such a way as to limit the realistic likelihood of the electorate finding out about his political allegiance. And I call on them to state publicly that they will initiate and lead the process of establishing procedures to ensure that candidates in all future NUJ elections declare any political allegiances.

Jeremy and Michelle, in considering your responses, please take into account the quotes from two journalists, reproduced in the %endorsements+section below. The first has an important lesson of our history from Kevin Cahill, freelance investigative journalist and past LFB secretary. The second comes from Dave Waller, FT deputy chief sub and chapel committee member, and speaks to more recent experience.

NUJ friends and colleagues, I am sorry to have been the bearer of bad news. Please don't hold that against me. You needed to know what was going on. Sorry for all the detail, but you needed to see the foundations because I reckon I could be due for something of a smear campaign.

I urge you to vote in this election. DO NOT DELAY, DO IT TODAY. Given the tumultuous times we face in this industry, you need the NUJ. But right now, the NUJ needs you.

I ask you to vote for editor of the *Journalist*:

Mark Watts 1.

Steve Usher 2. I know Steve a bit from my time on the *Sunday Express*. He has been the FoC at Daily Star/Express Newspapers for some 13 years. He is an NUJ star. He has some great ideas for the *Journalist*. I think that our magazine would be safe in his hands.

I suggest that you rank your 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> preferences according to your assessment of the strength of candidates' ideas, together with the breadth and depth of their journalistic experience.

NUJ Left (Richard Simcox) 8.

Lance the boil. Save the NUJ.

Don't give up on the NUJ as Jon Snow did. If you want to save the NUJ, please also e-mail your name, brief job details and full contact details to me at [savethenuj@yahoo.com](mailto:savethenuj@yahoo.com). We might need to stay in touch.

All the best,

Mark

My background as a journalist: <http://www.foiacentre.com/news-Mark-Watts-journalistic-background.html>

My LFB statement: <http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/journalist-candidates.html#Watts>

An independent journalist for editor of the *Journalist*: <http://www.foiacentre.com/news-NUJ-Journalist-editor-debate.html>

#### SELECT ENDORSEMENTS FOR MY CAMPAIGN:

Kevin Cahill, freelance investigative journalist and a former LFB secretary, said: "The appeal to factionalism of any kind is wrong in relation to this job."

"Over the 36 years of my membership, I have seen right and left damage the union's purpose and function."

Referring to the newspaper columnist, he added: "Bernard Levin was no contributor to union unity at the LFB, nor were his left-wing enemies. The result was a paralysed branch."

Dave Waller, FT deputy chief sub and chapel committee member, said: "In my view, if the NUJ is to recover from the onslaught that it has endured since Wapping, it needs to focus on how to defend members' pay, conditions and jobs. I think that process is more likely to be successful if it is framed politically, especially in the current climate, but should not involve using ultra-left motions on fringe issues to pretend that we are being radical (despite my support for the Palestinians and the fact that I am on the left).

"At the start of the year, we were threatened at the FT with a wave of compulsory redundancies, which could have led to the collapse of the union. Instead, we decided to ballot on strike action, management backed off, and the union has gone from strength to strength. Part of the reason we were successful in persuading members to take the virtually unprecedented step of strike action was because we placed the argument about the need for cuts in the context of the huge bonuses that FT managers were paying themselves."

Kevin Cahill and Dave Waller's fuller comments: <http://www.foiacentre.com/news-NUJ-Journalist-editor-endorsements04.html>

Elena Cosentino, a television producer working mainly on *Panorama* and other BBC programmes, formerly of CNN, said: "Mark Watts is my ideal candidate for the *Journalist* editorship. A born journalist, Mark would bring to the magazine the convictions and rigour of a tenacious and uncompromising, investigative mind."

"Most importantly, Mark is someone who truly walks the walk. While a loyal and very active member of the NUJ, he has never shied away from calling the NUJ leadership to account whenever he believed it may be slacking or not fulfilling its duties to members."

"I have no doubts that he will raise the standards of the magazine and encourage a healthy, free debate that will make the *Journalist* more relevant, and NUJ members more passionate about the union."

<http://www.foiacentre.com/news-NUJ-Journalist-editor-endorsements01.html>

Martin Short, veteran feature writer and television documentary producer, said: %At a time when outlets for real journalism are facing extinction, and union members in all media are losing their jobs or being forced to accept punitive pay cuts, the magazine needs an editor who combines the broadest employment experience with formidable muck-raking skills.+

%We need someone who can both dig out the often shocking stories affecting the livelihoods of our colleagues and crystallise the huge issues affecting the communications industries as a whole. Few NUJ members combine these skills better than Mark Watts.

An author of several books, including *Inside The Brotherhood*, Martin added: %With his commitment to developing the *Journalist* online . along with his wit and good humour . he will also help cast off the doom-and-gloom mood that could otherwise engulf us in these dark times. Mark Watts is my editor of choice, and, I urge, yours too.+

<http://www.foiacentre.com/news-NUJ-Journalist-editor-endorsements02.html>

ENDS