

Third Witness Statement

Michelle Stanistreet

27th January 2012

on behalf of

the National Union of Journalists

IN THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE PRESS

THIRD WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHELLE STANISTREET

ON BEHALF OF

THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

1. I am Michelle Stanistreet, of Headland House, 308-312 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP, and I make this witness statement from matters within my own knowledge save where I identify otherwise. Where I report that which others have told me, I believe that which I report to be the truth.

2. I am the General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists ("NUJ"). I have made two previous witness statements to the Leveson Inquiry. I confirm that the contents of that statement are true.

3. I make this statement to deal with the position of Derek Webb who was, briefly, a member of the NUJ and who gave evidence to the Inquiry on Day 18. It will be recalled that Mr Webb was a former police officer who became a private detective and was charged with various offences (Webb, Day 18, p.115) whilst working for the News of the World which, in the event, were not proceeded with. The evidence is (Webb, Day 18, pp117, confirmed by Colin Mylor, Day 17, pp65-67) that Neville Thurlbeck, the news editor of the News of the World, told Mr Webb that two conditions for his subsequent employment by the News of the World were that he terminated his private investigator's licence and that he became a member of the NUJ. Mr Thurlbeck said nothing about this in his evidence (Day 15am, pp.19-20; pm, pp27-34).

4. The requirement to join the NUJ is remarkable for two reasons. The first is that the News of the World together with every other News International title in the UK refuses to recognise the NUJ (or any other union) or, indeed to have anything to do with the NUJ. News International set up and funds the News International Staff Association ("NISA") which ostensibly represents its staff but in fact is subservient to News International. This is not merely my view, it reflects the decision of the Certification Officer of 18th May 2001 given under s.6 Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 that NISA was not an independent trade union since it was liable to interference by News International tending towards such control by News International (s.5 of the Act). That decision has not been appealed nor has any further application been made for a certificate of independence. I attach as MS1 a copy of that decision. The encouragement of the News of the World management for an employee to join the NUJ was clearly cynical since its purpose was not to secure for Mr Webb the benefits of being a union member but to help to conceal from the world Mr Webb's true occupation and his value to the News of the World. In doing so the News of the World was prepared to conspire to mislead the NUJ since it knew that Mr Webb was not a journalist and hence not eligible to join.

5. The second reason that it was remarkable that the News of the World required Mr Webb to be an NUJ member is that it clearly believed that NUJ membership bestowed on those who became members the insignia of being a true professional journalist. With that view I and my union agree.

6. Mr Webb then applied to join the NUJ. I attach as MS2 a copy of his application form. It is to be noted that his application is, to say the least, misleading. He asserts on page 1 that: he is a freelance researcher and that 100% of his total income is from journalism. There is no way that a reader without independent knowledge of Mr Webb and his activities could have deduced that “freelance researcher” was a euphemism for “private detective”.

7. As I mentioned in my opening statement to the Leveson Inquiry on 16th November 2011 (Day 3, pp1ff), the NUJ has 38,000 members. Amongst its 40 employees (most of whom are officials representing the members) there is a membership department based in the London Head Office with four members of staff. Every application for membership is checked by a member of the team to ensure that the form has been fully completed. They check to see if the entries for job title and past and present employers are consistent with the applicant being a journalist. They check that the proposer and seconder are paid up members of the NUJ and they rely on those members' signatures for confirmation that the applicant is what s/he says s/he is. Not unreasonably, the assumption is that the applicant, the proposer and the seconder are all giving a true picture to the union. The union does not have the resources to check every single application form – that is why we make sure that prospective members have proposers to vouch for them. In practice, this is done in workplaces by our chapel representatives.

8. No prospective members are required to list their professional qualifications – and indeed, there are many NUJ members who have entered the industry and gained experience without “formal” qualifications. One important point to add is that if the News of the World, or any other News International chapels, had had a functioning NUJ chapel, its representatives and members would have known of Derek Webb and the true nature of his involvement with the paper. It is not feasible for Head Office staff to carry out an independent check given that some 80

applications a week are processed by the NUJ.

9. All members joining the NUJ are required to complete the NUJ's membership application form. The union operates a system where prospective members have to be nominated by a proposer and a seconder – in this case the proposer and seconder were bona fide members of the NUJ in excellent standing. Under NUJ structures, branches scrutinise applications and ask further questions, if required, before endorsing the application of a new member.

10. Once the form has been checked, a provisional membership number is allocated when the details are entered on the NUJ database. The member is then allocated to a Branch of the union, depending on the kind of work s/he does (e.g. national newspapers, magazine, book production etc) and on his/her address (there are geographical branches). In this case Mr Webb was allocated to the Freelance Branch in London and this is what the letters "LFB" represent scribbled in the bottom right hand corner of the first page. Before admission to membership the relevant Branch must approve the applicant's membership. Usually, at the beginning of the next meeting of the Branch, applications are read out and members present asked if they approve the admission of each applicant. If there are matters to discuss that discussion is had. His application was considered, the word of his proposer and seconder accepted and his membership agreed. In consequence Mr Webb was admitted to membership on 3rd March 2009.

11. His activities did not come to my attention until September 2011 as one of the many individual cases of journalists seeking help from the NUJ in the wake of the closure of the News of the World. Any freelance members whose query relates to employment status are asked to complete an employment status questionnaire. I attach as MS3 a copy of his employment status questionnaire. In this Mr Webb alleges he was instructed to join the NUJ when working as a private detective (q.12 employment status questionnaire). He went on to make his case public in interviews on BBC's Newsnight and in newspaper coverage he referred to his membership of the NUJ, which caused me to check our records. I found the behaviour of senior

executives at News International in this case breathtakingly cynical – this from a company who has adopted a hostile and aggressive stance towards the NUJ and its members for over 25 years. Whilst we run a rigorous membership process, it also necessarily relies on good faith. The process to expel Mr Webb from membership would have commenced under our rules but for the fact that he resigned on 28th November 2011.

a. I confirm that the facts stated in this witness statement are true

b. Signed.....

c. Dated.....27th January 2012.....

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