Boston Members Boycott Twitter

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anagers at the Boston Herald got an unwelcome surprise after they suspended reporter Chris Villani — allegedly for violating the company’s social media policy. The 2013 policy, which requires reporters to get approval from the Executive Editor or his designee prior to tweeting breaking news, had never been enforced before.

Reporters launched a three-day Twitter boycott to coincide with the dates of the suspension.

The dispute arose on April 20, when Villani tweeted an accurate, well-sourced scoop: “The notes found in #AaronHernandez cell were letters to his daughter & fiancée, saying he loved them & would see them in heaven, per source.”

The protest was organized through the union’s Facebook page, with dozens of people providing input, said Antonio Planas of The Newspaper Guild of Greater Boston.

Forty-seven of 53 local union members on Twitter blacked out their images, including one union member who opened a Twitter account just to participate.

“We have never undertaken such a public campaign,” Planas said. “It took a lot of guts for our members to do what they did and to stand up for our colleague.”

Management took notice. “They were shocked and scrambling,” Planas said. “There were a lot of whispers and several closed-door meetings.”

Media in Boston soon took notice of the journalists’ Twitter boycott and began posting questions on social media, he noted.

“The Twitter blackout was great,” declared O’Ryan Johnson, chair of the editorial unit at the Herald. It was good for the reporter to get the support of his colleagues and to see support from many news organizations who thought our policy was bizarre, outdated and showed a lack of trust in reporters.

“It was good for management to see 90 percent of the Guild who participates in social media thought the policy was misguided,” he said.