



MERSEYSIDE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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ALL MEMBERS

DAILY MAIL ARTICLE

Dear Brother/Sister,

You may, or hopefully may not, have read the latest article in the Daily Mail which spews vitriol over the London membership for having the courage to take industrial action to defend themselves from being sacked. This action comes on the back of a 79% yes vote on a massive 79% turn out.

The journalist, Leo McKinstry, no friend of the working class nor it seems of the FBU, accuses our Unions leadership of obduracy and inflexibility in leading the action in London, many of you may have seen the London Fire Authority Chair, Cllr Brian Coleman attempt to ambush the General Secretary Matt Wrack on the Channel 4 news recently where he called on the General Secretary to immediately undertake talks with him to resolve the London dispute. Matt immediately agreed to those talks and a 9 o clock start time the next morning was agreed live on the televised news programme with news reporter Jon Snow. You will not be surprised to learn that neither Mr Coleman, nor the London Chief Fire Officer, showed up at that meeting. It is clearly not the FBU who are neither obdurate nor inflexible in what is turning out to be one of the most important disputes the FBU has ever been involved in.

Mr McKinstry states that no one doubts our bravery and that we constantly have to prove ourselves, willing to risk our lives in the name of public safety, he believes that we have a spirit of self sacrifice and toughness as we carry out our dangerous work and that we are respected and have the affection of the public, Mr McKinstry seems to have a different view of us when we simply wish to act as a collective to defend ourselves from such issues as mass sackings. He may believe that we should put aside all our principles, bravery and toughness if the danger comes from management or Authorities rather from fire, he certainly seems to despise us for banding together when times get tough.

Mr McKinstry goes further and says that we, as firefighters, have some of the most generous conditions of any employee in the country. That is the norm for the right wing media to treat any worker in struggle such as our brothers and sisters in London, to be on one hand applauded for our bravery and work and then to be attacked for our 'generous' working conditions, it is shocking hypocrisy of the worst kind.

But let's look at his claim, he says we have generous conditions; the average public sector pay for a public servant is currently £539 per week (taken from the latest Economic and Labour Review figures from the Governments statisticians) the average pay for a firefighter at the highest pay grade (competent) is £541 per week (before deductions and don't forget that we in the FPS pay 11% contributions) and it is Governments intention to keep it at that level for at least 3 years and indeed decrease it given proposed pension and benefit attacks. So our generous conditions given all the platitudes heaped on us by Mr McKinstry, is that we are currently paid £2 more than the average public sector worker.

With breathtaking ignorance he goes on to say that the fire and rescue service as a result of FBU bullying remains a bastion of outmoded inefficiencies, I am sure we do not have to list here the number of agreed shift changes, staffing changes, working practise changes, USAR working, CFS working, IPDS introductions, IRMP introductions, that have been introduced with agreement with the FBU and the list goes on and on.

Then crucially he returns to the Mails previous headline in which he refers to the MF&RS Chief Fire Officer, Mr McGuirk, who he states admitted that we could provide 'a far better service' with fewer employees. Mr McKinstry eulogises further and says that Mr McGuirk has proven himself by '*dismissing some 'bone idle people' - to use his own words*' and reducing the staff from 1550 to 850. If any professional firefighter believes that we in Merseyside currently have a far better fire service today than we did 10 years ago I have yet to meet them.

It is sadly the case that pumps are off the run on a daily basis and in growing and alarming numbers, it is the case that two pump stations that have become one pump stations on a de facto basis and are riding with 4 firefighters with increasing regularity and it is the case that stations that are fortunate to remain at 2 pumps ride with 4 and 4, that is the fact of the matter. Those staffing figures I believe will become problematic for the MF&RA and an issue we will be taking up with them as a matter of urgency.

McKinstry states in his article that a Watch Manager in charge of 12 firefighters is paid £40,000 a year. Wrong! A Watch Manager is paid £31,940 (development) to £34,961 (WMB Competent).

He continues by saying that although we are as brave as lions we are needed less and less, repeating the mantra of those who denigrate our work by saying that we are not as busy as previously, you know who they are and you have heard them say it, it is said for a reason and it is wrong. They ignore the fact that we have seen in Merseyside the greatest reduction on jobs any fire and rescue service in the country has seen. You will be aware that the national fire and rescue service has seen a 4.4% drop in firefighter jobs in the last 5 years, yet in Merseyside the drop is an astonishing 28.7%, those of us that are still here still have to do the work that used to be done by 28.7% more of us just 5 years ago - it isn't rocket science.

Further, with the removal of so many pumps due to a chronic lack of staffing, we have to pick that work up also, along with changes to mobilising policies for all the LLAR and R&R stations. Couple that with an increase in the numbers of all incidents attended (not just fires) and that increased workload for those still here is significant.

In the light of this disgraceful attack on us as professional firefighters, on our work and our conditions as well as using the words of our own Chief Fire Officer against us, we will be seeking urgent repudiation from the members of the Fire Authority and asking that they, as our employers speak out against the bitterness of the likes of McKinstry and to support their firefighters. We will inform you of their response.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary

