

Date: Tuesday, 29 August 2006

## **ALL MEMBERS - STRIKE UPDATE 2**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Your Officials, local as well as regional and national, would first like to record our thanks, admiration and pride of the Merseyside FBU membership who have returned an astounding 71.4% yes vote on a magnificent 82% turnout. It truly is a stunning indication of the real depth of feeling on the present dispute with the loss of 120 jobs, the implementation of 96 hour working in Merseyside, the only such system in the UK Fire Service and the first time firefighters are working a 96 hour week since the 1940's, a disgraceful attack on our control members jobs and conditions and the policy of overtime being worked at sometimes less than flat rate of pay, a breach of the Grey Book and now made even worse by employees of MF&RS who are prepared to work through industrial action being paid at the premium rate the very rate we demand through this dispute.

You will now be aware that the second round of strike dates has been announced with the action taking place for a four day period starting at 12 noon on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2006 running through to 12 noon 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006. That action has been called to reflect the genuine frustration and anger our members feel with the councillors on the fire authority not even calling for talks, exploratory or otherwise, with the FBU in an attempt to resolve this dispute. Even more bewildering is the statement made from councillors and service managers saying that the FBU hadn't called for talks either. That shows the contempt these people have for our members on this issue. We have made it clear on every occasion that we are ready, willing and able to meet with the councillors to sit down and properly attempt to negotiate a settlement.

We have met the lead councillors on three occasions and the FBU genuinely believed the meetings were constructive and paved the way for further talks. It is now more than apparent that those talks were nothing more than a sham and they took place to placate us rather than move the issues forward. At the last meeting we again requested further urgent talks to take place as soon as possible, we have heard nothing from those councillors since that meeting.

You will no doubt have seen the barrage of correspondence from the management team which implores us to strike responsibly, advises us on how to picket lawfully and how much we will lose if we go on strike, you will have not, however, have seen one shred of evidence that this management team have called, or asked for the councillors to call, for dispute resolution talks.

You may have seen some press reports that record service managers saying that 100 FBU members will work through the strike. Please be assured that is absolutely standard management tactics designed to dent our members confidence, we expected it and in fact

stated as such in previous all member circulars. It is true that a small number of FBU members have left the Union, we knew about the vast majority of those members had or would leave the FBU, in fact we knew about some as early as last October, it is true to say that some of those members have left for reasons we are currently pursuing. It is also true that some of the members who have left is incredibly disappointing but we also feel that some will rejoin when they fully consider the fact that all FBU members are decent, principled, people determined to defend our fire service from decimation. Members who include leaders and future leaders of the Fire Service determined to stave off the attacks which will compromise our health and safety and the safety of our community members.

You may also recall that the FBU have met many local and national politicians, political leaders who many have taken strike action in their careers and who are respected political leaders. I have to say in all our meetings with politicians, local and national, with the exception of a small few on the fire authority, we have yet to hear one dissenting voice, and all those we have met support our cause.

We still hope that the councillors on the fire authority will call us into talks, even at this late stage, to at least attempt to avert this action. There are many members who have expressed a view that this dispute has in some way been contrived by management and the fire authority; it has not been lost on your officials. We trust this is not the case, but some reports seem to indicate the contrary. Even if the dispute has been contrived as some suggest, it is still absolutely right that we defend ourselves and our family and friends against this attack. We are aware of management meetings that are to say the least, very enthusiastically, indicating that those who take strike action are not considered as fire service leaders, we are aware of an email communication from senior management that many consider to be intimidatory in its content, that email is at our lawyers for legal consideration and we will report back any developments on that matter. It is expected that a retraction email may be put out, which may be too late, as the saying goes you cannot un-break an egg.

It also seems to the FBU that the councillors on the authority, who do not publicly distance themselves from this management stance, support that stance. Many on the authority declare themselves to be committed trade unionists, now is the time it seems to demonstrate their commitment to that bold statement. I can report that we have also sent a copy of the email to the NW Trade Union Council (TUC) for comment.

We will of course keep you fully informed of any and all developments as and when they occur.

Unity is being proven once again to be our strength.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary