

Date: Wednesday, 18 June 2008

ALL MEMBERS

MF&RA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008.

Dear Brother/Sister,

Today the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority met to decide on the running of the fire authority for the next twelve months and it would be an understatement to say that it was a fiery meeting. The FBU was in attendance at this meeting and took a close interest in the comments made and political positions adopted by all parties.

The meeting opened with Cllr Prout (Lab) and Cllr Byrom (was Con now Lab) giving farewell words after being taken off the Authority. Cllr Byrom reminded all in the room that the fire service is a family that should stay strong, a statement that the FBU fully agree with and support and constantly remind senior managers and politicians who wish to criticise the Union from time to time that not only is the Union built on principle and unity but also comradeship and friendship, a fact that they forget.

This year, for the first year in the history of the Merseyside fire authority, Labour was not the largest political group, or one of the two largest political groups as happened last year, and despite Labour winning more seats at the May elections within Liverpool, the Liberal Democrats returned the most councillors to the fire authority. Convention states that the largest party on the authority would then take control with one or more of the minority parties supporting them. That would have resulted in the Lib Dems gaining control of the fire authority with Labour or the Tories supporting them.

Given the national political scene, and given that Cameron is attempting to do to Brown what Blair did to Major in 1997, it was astonishing but amusing to view the Tories voting with the Labour Party to keep Cllr Tony Newman (Lab) in the Chair, and thus seeing Labour remaining the controlling party (even though technically there is no party in overall control) and then have to justify it in the public meeting. The FBU is not in any way trying to be flippant in stating that it was amusing but we watched the political process all but being rendered obsolete by both Labour and Tories desperately denying what all present could clearly see was a pact formed between the two parties.

This decision was reached after Cllr Eddie Clein (Lib Dem) launched a blistering attack on the Tories and the decision of them to vote with the Labour group. The debate at

times got so heated that at one point Cllr Newman (Lab Chair of the Authority) told Cllr Clein to 'shut up and get off your high horse'.

Cllr Clein also pointed out that Labour was relying on a Tory vote which if all the years of experience on the fire authority was added up from all 5 of the Tory group would have amounted to 4 years worth of experience. Cllr Clein repeatedly made the point that the mantra of defence from the Tories was the saying that **'if it aint broke don't fix it.'** We will be constantly reminding the Tories of their statement in the coming months and years and pointing out that if they do not wish to be labelled as hypocrites then the same adage will be the benchmark for all future management proposals.

Cllr Rennie responding for the Tories and desperately defending the position of her group, a position which was more unsustainable given the defection of long standing Tory Cllr Byrom who was sitting directly behind her in the public gallery, denied that she had led her group into a pact with Labour but then in a moment of pure elucidation warned the Labour Chair that if the trust (between Conservative and Labour) is eroded in the next twelve months then they would move to support the LGA convention (i.e. to then support the Lib Dems). It would be difficult, the FBU believes, for any reasonable person not to view that as a form of threat that if Labour do not fulfil in their promise that relies on trust then the Tories will desert them.

In a final interesting episode, Cllr Colbert then warned that he could not support any increase to members allowances when as a result of poor Government grant settlements that there have to have been cuts in the fire service year on year, with the chief fire officer responding by stating that we apparently have more firefighters than ever and we have to remain positive. Cllr Colbert also commented that he didn't wish to be in power in the next twelve months because he knew what is going to happen in the future.

The FBU will be seeking to meet with the political groups in the near future to advance our concerns on current issues and comments made at that fire authority meeting.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary