

Date: Wednesday, 26 July 2006

ALL MEMBERS - MERSEYSIDE

Dear Brother/Sister,

As predicted in the most recent FBU all members circular, the Merseyside management propaganda machinery has whirred into top speed, and while the FBU will not dignify most of the diatribe that you have been subjected to as your officials would never insult your intelligence in the manner others have in the last number of days, I think it is important to point out one or two of the more serious misrepresentations from a management team who would be better served assisting in resolving this dispute rather than appearing to inflame the situation.

In the email correspondence from Mr McGuirk dated 21st July 2006, entitled 'Notice of Ballot' he states that he received a notice of ballot without any warning, in fact he uses the term 'out of the blue' on several occasions which is standard media trained tactics. What Mr McGuirk fails to recall is the letter the FBU received from ACO Evans 20th June 2006 and circulated as a Merseyside FBU All Members Circular, 4th July 2006, after Mr McGuirk was quoted in the Daily Post as saying '*let me reassure you that no suggestion whatsoever has been made to me by the FBU about proposals to ballot for strike action.*'

Mr Evans in that correspondence of the 20th June 2006, states '*Firstly, I would like to thank you for the courtesy of confirming my suspicions that the FBU on Merseyside do have EC (FBU) permission to ballot for strike action.*' Naturally the FBU would inform the employer's local joint secretary of that position and did so, despite Mr McGuirk alleging he remains ignorant of the fact.

It is a fact that Cleveland FBU members received permission to ballot the same day Merseyside members received our permission, Cleveland have now successfully concluded their ballot with a tremendous 74% yes vote. The Merseyside officials fruitlessly searched for resolution without having to commence a ballot, that search was exhausted completely when on the 28th June 2006, within a meeting with Mr McGuirk, the FBU requested that the disputed proposals be suspended to enable further talks to continue unfettered. Mr McGuirk, on that day rejected that reasonable request. It must be remembered that after a successful ballot of Cleveland members, those members have not had to take a minute's strike action as because of their ballot success they are now in proper talks with their councillors to resolve the issue.

In his email of the 22nd July 2006, entitled 'Ballot Update', Mr McGuirk states on two occasions (Four pumps and MACC shift changes) that the FBU requested an extension to the consultation. Members will be rightly suspicious of that statement as it is not true. The FBU requested that the proposals be withdrawn and as I have said a request which was rejected by management. Worse, management have recently taken the unacceptable stance upon the MACC shift changes that the '*employer does have the right to change shift patterns.*'

He also states that he and the Authority continue to be absolutely committed to the nationally and locally agreed processes, if the situation wasn't so serious that statement that would almost be comical.

Talks with the councillors are to take place today which we hope will be productive and I will inform you on the outcome of those talks in further correspondence, but it must be said that it has been disappointing that Mr McGuirk in his email communication of the 23rd July 2006, entitled 'Ballot Update', declares that '*Neither I nor the treasurer could support the Fire Authority in any decision to mis-use reserves in the*

irresponsible manner suggested. We should now surely be asking, who exactly is running the fire service, the locally elected, locally accountable councillors of Merseyside or senior managers.

In that same email correspondence Mr McGuirk refers to the Union identifying £2.5M in reserves, he then refers to our financial experts Hard Dowdy, and attempts to state that Hard Dowdy agreed that it was both reasonable and responsible to hold some reserves for matters of unforeseen emergency. Mr McGuirk, the FBU believe, has intentionally misrepresented Hard Dowdy and for evidence I attach Hard Dowdy's response to that allegation. Quite simply, those budget reserves could and should be used to stave off in excess of 120 job losses within MF&RS.

You may have seen a copy of a letter from a manager, who has decided to work the LLAR system, I am sure all members will see that correspondence for what it is. That manager, however, recently resigned from the FBU and wrote to me stating *'I thank you and the FBU for all your consideration and support in the past fourteen years but feel as I wish to progress through the management of MF&RS that the time is right for me to now terminate my membership of the FBU.'* To the FBU that is a clear indication of the current strategy of promotions and membership of the FBU unwittingly revealed.

You may have seen Mr McGuirk in the local media referring to the 120 job losses and is reported to have stated that *'Those posts have already gone through people leaving and retirement.'* (*Daily Post - 26/7/06*) That explodes the myth peddled by senior managers that no decision has yet been made on these issues, as they have been reported in the press as jobs already gone.

Finally, it is vital to remember that the last three ballots for industrial action have occurred successfully in Suffolk, Hertfordshire and Cleveland. All about job losses, and if you total all the job losses proposed and defended against in those three brigades, it comes to 103 firefighter posts. MF&RS are intent on slashing in excess of 120 posts. What was clearly a driving force in resolving the Suffolk and Herts disputes and a crucial factor in Cleveland now in proper talks with their employers, was the resounding yes vote in their ballots.

We truly hope it doesn't come to that in Merseyside with the talks planned today, but if it is the case that the talks prove to be unproductive then only a massive yes vote could lead to resolving this dispute possibly without having to take any strike action. Your vote then is crucial so please use it wisely and support your Union.

If it does mean industrial action is the only alternative left in which we defend Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service for ourselves, our families and our communities, due to the intransigence of councillors then short term action is infinitely preferable to the long term decimation of our Fire and Rescue Service.

Other FBU members in other fire services have shown us the way in which we now must follow and together we can win the battle for our fire service.

Unity is strength.

Yours in unity

L Skarratts
Brigade Secretary

NRNG/emd
24 July 2006

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Dear Sirs

MFRA Budget and Revenue Reserve

Thank you for the copy of Chief Fire Officer Tony McGuirk's email and would comment as follows.

We note that the message includes a statement that 'and they [Hard Dowdy] agreed that it was both reasonable and responsible to hold some reserves for matters of unforeseen urgency. One example of such an issue could be to meet the cost of strike action.'

Our report dated 5 May 2006 noted in paragraph 3 that the authority 'maintained a revenue reserve' and stated that 'no indication is given for a rationale for maintaining a revenue reserve in a time of scarce resources.'

During the course of our meeting the Chief Fire Officer stated that the five year budget plan was now balanced and working well. In the light of that comment he was asked to indicate the need for a reserve of £2.5M to be replenished immediately. At the end of the meeting the Chief Fire Officer agreed to take a more detailed look at the budget reserves.

Yours faithfully

Hard Dowdy