

Date: Monday, 31 July 2006

## **ALL MEMBERS**

### **BALLOT UPDATE**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Unfortunately most of our members have had to endure being instructed to attend service headquarters on operational appliances to be lectured at by a management team who clearly now have no wish to resolve the current dispute. Members attending those meetings have reported that no questions were allowed at the later meetings, as members who earlier in the propaganda exercise did voice support for the ballot which was clearly 'off message'. Since then censorship took over and to be quite frank a circulation of a memo to stations would have more efficient and cost effective.

You will also be aware of the management tactic to appeal to our members that the ballot came '*out of the blue*' and that they cannot understand the actions of your Union as '*consultation is still ongoing and no decision has yet been made*'.

**That myth has since been dramatically exposed as the chief fire officer has emphatically stated in the press that all 120 jobs have already gone.**

Despite your officials making a powerful presentation to the group leaders and the councillors on the fire authority the day after, the fire authority decided to remove two fire appliances from Croxteth and Buckley Hill to train those prepared to work through the strike, which has now happened. Bizarrely, the fire authority then voted to adhere to the national and local procedures despite clearly continuing to breach them.

LLAR is now being implemented despite the shift system being unlawful and in clear breach of the TAP recommendations. The decision has been made. The chief fire officer almost laughably beseeches to us to stick to the agreed procedures, you may recall that the FBU wrote to the chief fire officer, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2006, stating in that letter that '*..the legal opinion MF&RS relied upon, advises that if agreement cannot be reached a joint reference could be made to the NJC Joint Secretaries, RAP and/or ACAS should be adopted. Although the FBU had not been previously made aware of the **advice it seems appropriate at this time to pursue that avenue to resolve this issue.***'

Mr Wright, clerk to the authority, replied on behalf of Mr McGuirk on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2006, rejecting the FBU request to resolve this matter with NJC assistance and stated that '*I confirm therefore, that the disputes procedures have accordingly been exhausted.*'

The consultation on the four pumps issue was extended on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2006, by six weeks, not at the request of the FBU as stated by management, but solely by their own decision. No contact from management was made within those six weeks and we suspect they were using that time to figure a way to dispel the irrefutable points made by the FBU. That six weeks extension concluded on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006, the day the trade dispute letter was sent to the authority.

The MACC shift changes issue was presented to the FBU as a matter of consultation, and despite the fact management again trot out the mantra that consultation is ongoing, the FBU have been very clear on this point in that shift changes are national conditions of service and as such are matters of negotiation rather than consultation. Management reject that claim. Worse than that, management have reiterated that they reserve the right to implement new shift patterns in MACC, even if that requires the dismissal of our members to re-engage on the new contract and working systems. An absolutely disgraceful position to adopt and one that is, I am sure you will agree, totally unacceptable. The FBU requested that management immediately withdraw the proposal, management rejected that request.

The part time contracts dispute is another issue that management simply denied any chance of resolution by denying the avenue to national dispute assistance, they even admit it in their letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2006, posted on the MF&RS website. It is fact that our members are now being paid less than the agreed rate of pay for overtime and less than our brothers and sisters in GMC, Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumbria.

Senior management have also very recently visited the trainees currently going through their training at the STC and advised them that they had contacted payroll and discovered that their FBU subs have yet to be taken out of their pay, as such they intimated that they where not yet members of the FBU. At the request of the trainees, your officials visited the STC this morning to explain that as soon as they sign the application form, they are full members of the Union. Your officials today were denied access to those trainees, our members.

The Union believe management have been intentionally provocative right through this dispute and have adopted transparent and naive union busting tactics to attempt to smash the FBU to pave the way to implement the biggest cuts agenda in the history of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and the severest attack on our conditions of service, more severe than the national employers have ever attempted to do. It is a sad fact that only 5 years after we all took strike action on an officer specific issue, a very small number of those officers who enjoyed our solidarity then, have resigned from the Union now, a shameful episode I am sure you will agree.

Management have worked hard to produce a small but divided part of the workforce, a part of the workforce who I am sure realise now that they have been used in the most despicable way, and been placed in an engineered position that has taken a long time for management to develop and could have at any time and at a stroke been resolved with industrial harmony and consequently increased morale quickly achieved. Everybody has seen through this tactic and those who do not defend our service with us attack it with the same gusto as the same management who are against us.

Together, however, we can and must win this fight. Most of us are now enjoying a career in the fire service because of the strike action back in 1977, management are now using the excuse of the cost of the pensions of those who fought for us in 1977 as the reason why we have to go back to those 1977 conditions, that in itself is an absolute disgrace and must be fought off.

**It is now crucial for you to use your vote to send the only message this management team will ever understand, we will not put up with this treatment any longer. Together we must fight and together we will win.**

Yours in unity

L Skarratts  
Brigade Secretary