

What more do they want? Enough is enough.

As you read this, things have overtaken us. I wrote this in the middle of yet another ballot to put on paper how I felt at that time

14 AUGUST 2004

I have lost count of how many ballots we have had in London over recent years, but I am sure of one thing and I can tell you this, from the local ballot we held and won in London on co-responding, to the national ballot we are taking part in now, all have the same importance ... ***it is my choice and my right as a member of a trade union.***

It is because of our union that I have that right and I do not want that taken away from me. I will fight to the end for my rights and to be able to have a say in our union. It is essential for the future of our union and for our service to the general public, that the result for this ballot is a YES.

Lots of people ask me "what's this ballot for now?" Most are fully aware of emergency resolution 15 proposed by Nottinghamshire at this years reconvened Annual Conference in Southport. In brief, the Emergency Resolution called for a ballot for discontinuous strike action, if stage 2 and stage 3 pay increases had not been met in full by the 30th July 2004.

The Ballot didn't start until after the 2nd August. Once again the FBU were being flexible by giving the Employers more time. Let's not forget how flexible and patient the FBU and its members have been up to now.

Stage 2 of the pay agreement was 7% due in November 2003. FBU members took part in a ballot to determine whether they accepted or rejected the Employers proposal of the 7% being split, 3.5% now and 3.5% later. The members voted to

accept this proposal and the second part of this payment is now more than eight months overdue.

It has been reported to the Members by the Executive Council that all the work has been completed for stage 3 and that the Audit Commission's verification is not a barrier to the release of the payment. However; the Employers state that they want more time to digest the verification that the Audit Commission has completed.

What nonsense. We see yet again the Employers trying anything to delay and scupper paying us what they owe and in fact honour what they promised in a signed pay agreement.

The Employers are obviously nervous about the ballot and it has become clear to me that they will try anything to stop us voting YES. One area they are pushing in London is so bad I don't know whether to laugh or cry about it.

Apparently, if we go on strike for 4/5 days we will lose all the money that we are owed, so we will not gain anything (only the continuity of conditions that were never on the table for discussion!). When will they realise that it isn't just about the money. I will not be bullied and pushed to one side like I don't matter.

I work in the Fire Service and I am an FBU member. We are one and the same. I think the Employers do not realise (or choose to forget) that when they attack the Fire Brigades Union they are attacking the very same people who make the Fire Service the best performing public service, in the words of their own watchdog, the Audit Commission.

This attempt to get me to vote NO has actually made me more determined to vote YES. It has shown me what little I have gained from the pay agreement so far and at what cost to the service.

I have personally lost my long service

payment if I go for promotion now and if I don't go for promotion I am going to lose it anyway over a period of time. Under IPDS role maps, I will be doing the rank/role above my own for no extra payment (acting up allowance).

This latest attempt to introduce new issues at the last minute makes me realise that I don't think this will be the end to the employers' demands. What else have I got to give up over time? My pension! The shift that is family friendly! Remember 'Smash and Grab' well it appears it's manifested itself again under the guise of the 2003 pay agreement!

To be truthful a ballot is the last thing I wanted, but we have been more than fair in trying to reach an agreement and have been left with no alternative but to ballot. The employers have abused us for too long.

When I go over the facts with London women members about what happened at the meeting between the FBU and the Employers at the National Joint Council on Monday 2nd August, their angry response about the way they have been treated is no surprise to me.

During the two and a half weeks up until the full NJC meeting on the 2nd August, there was over 110 hours of negotiations in which both sides had reached a provisional agreement. Both parties had worked together and were ready to move on. At the full NJC meeting 7 people from the employer's side turned up to vote, most of these people had never been to a Fire Service NJC meeting before.

Did they know what they were voting on? Did they understand the issues? Or were they told how to vote? Christina Jebb who was the Chair of the Employers side before she was sacked, stated in an interview on BBC World at One "My disappointment at the people that had been sent along was that

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PREGNANCY

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because they hadn't been part of the negotiations previously it wasn't really possible to be sure that everybody fully understood the import of the action that was taken"

I have been to many meetings and would find it very hard to vote on an issue if I did not know the full history. I am aware of the shameless behaviour of these employers and their political manipulation at the meeting.

We do not know what further demands they may now raise and when if at all we will get our money. I hope we get a YES vote, as this is vitally important for us as individual members and our union as a whole. We must stop continually backing off; the employers have abused our goodwill for long enough.

I am angry because I have been lied to; lied to about the Employers intentions to "modernise" the fire service when they should have called it "smashing and destroying the British Fire Service" One Tory politician openly stated on a BBC news report last week, 'this government have stated quite openly that this is now about finishing the Fire Brigades Union'.

Good spending of public funds or malfeasance? The latter I think. Like other members in London I know it is time to put the resolution into action and when the ballot result is YES then I am prepared to take the action that I voted YES for.

27 AUGUST 2004

AS this goes to print we now know that the Employers have finally reached an agreement with the FBU and they are paying us the money that we are owed.

I know that the outcome on the 26th August 2004 is due to FBU members being united, determined and standing together to tell the employers 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH'.

I don't however think that the Employers will leave us alone now. What about the replacement for LSI, IPDS, their plans for IRMP and the pensions.

I know that it is even more important now than ever to be united and strong to defend the attacks that will be coming.

Sally Harper
London Women's Representative

Pregnancy in the Fire Service

Sam Rye, Region 3 women's representative, says some Brigades would like to put pregnant employees out of sight and mind



WHEN I joined the fire service at the tender age of 18 years, children were never something I gave a lot of thought to. However when I eventually settled down the time seemed right to have a child.

It was what I thought to be a natural progression. As a woman I believed it to be my right, a natural occurrence and wonderful achievement to become pregnant. Not in the eyes of the British Fire Service though!

Although women have served in the fire service for many years it seemed that even at the time I announced I was first pregnant it all seemed a bit of a shock to my employers! What were they going to do with me!

I think a dark cupboard away from prying eyes might have been their preferred choice, but with some hard work from a National Women's Committee union rep we eventually got the matter sorted out. I have since moved Brigades and decided that I would like to have another child and, believe it or not, I am now on my third.

Wow! I must be a glutton for punishment. It's not that I don't want to be pregnant for the third time but my employers certainly don't want me to be!

I have decided that none short of a rugby team is going to be enough for me now as I want to see my employers get it right without all the fuss. I mean, anybody would think that I had been impregnated

by an alien from outer space.

I don't want any of you to be put off having a baby! Go for it, literally! And there are some Brigades out there that are making an effort to make being pregnant in the fire service not such a commotion!

But not nearly enough is being done. These things, of course, cost money to put in place (not nearly as much as you might think)! Does encouraging women to join the Fire Service, and stay, fit into our employers' perception of modernisation! Well of course we know the answer to that!

If any of you out there are pregnant, contemplating becoming pregnant or are on maternity leave and feel you have been treated without the dignity and respect that you deserve please don't suffer in silence. Contact your National Women's Committee rep for your region.

■ If your region does not have a rep then contact either the NWC secretary or chair. We are all a friendly bunch and all details are dealt with in confidence.

The National Women's Committee is constantly striving to improve Brigades maternity policies!

■ Below are a few telephone numbers that may be of some help to you either now or in the future.

British Pregnancy Advisory Head Office
01564 793225

Maternity Alliance 020 7588 8582

National Childbirth Trust 0870 4448707

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers
020 7813 1481

Miscarriage Association
01924 200 799

Association for Postnatal Illness
020 7386 0868

Stillbirth and Neonatal Society
020 7436 5881