

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION (LONDON REGION)



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To all London FBU members

Dear Brothers and Sisters

CONCLUSION OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE

I am pleased to report that, following a period of consultation with members at branch level, the FBU has reached an agreement (enclosed) with the London Fire Brigade, which brings to an end the industrial dispute that began on 13 August.

The deal represents a decent victory for the union. We achieved positive outcomes in a number of areas, including:

- An acceptance by brigade managers that they have no right to alter the CPD scheme without FBU agreement
- Significant changes to the subsistence policy, which include scrapping the clause which designates training venues as the 'normal place of work' after three days and abolishing the 'as the crow flies' rule when measuring travel distances
- An improvement from 80% to minimum 90% of normal rate of pay for members on light duties for more than six months. A further commitment that members approaching retirement have their pay protected.
- The scrapping of random testing for drugs and alcohol, other than in cases where a problem has previously been identified
- An extension to the deadline for middle managers to make alternative accommodation arrangements for camping-out
- A withdrawal of the threat to demote area manager members who declined to accept conversion to the role of deputy assistant commissioner (DAC). An agreement that the role of area manager will not be permanently deleted from the establishment.
- Changes to the process for booking leave, reducing some of the problems regularly encountered by members in this area
- Changes to the process for classifying injuries as due-to-service, which removes authority from human resources managers and returns it to managers at station-level. An agreement that 'non-due-to-service' will no longer be the automatic default position.
- An agreement to remind all managers, in writing, of the strict and clearly defined circumstances under which targeted-calling is permissible

There can be no question that the courage and strength shown by FBU members in taking industrial action has led to the brigade making a number of concessions that they otherwise would not have made.

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We did not take industrial action lightly. But, when it commenced, our members held firm throughout. There is no doubt that brigade managers were rocked by the magnificent show of unity displayed by our members. By simply withdrawing our goodwill, we made it virtually impossible for brigade managers to run the service in the way they had taken for granted for so many years. This is why the brigade was eventually forced back to the table, having declared previously that they would not speak to the union while the industrial action was ongoing.

Our victory in this dispute highlights what can be achieved when we stand together and fight for what we believe in. It is a salutary lesson which will stand us in good stead should we be called upon to take similar action to defend the shift system in the coming months.

The union's London regional committee (LRC) gave a commitment to members at the outset that not a single penny of core pay would be lost, and I am pleased that we were able to meet that commitment. It is recognised that some members, as part of the withdrawal of goodwill, were asked to give up payments above core pay, such as pre-arranged overtime and allowances for voluntary activities such as Life and the cycle project. Without the support of this section of members, the action would not have had the impact it did.

It is equally important to pay tribute to our brothers and sisters in RMC, who had a very difficult role to play in attempting to strike a balance between supporting the industrial action and meeting their contractual obligations. That they were able to achieve this is a credit to them.

For middle managers, we have again shown that there is only one union in the London Fire Brigade that is prepared to fight hard for their interests. Unlike other, more docile, organisations, the FBU has shown that it does not shy away from a battle when our employers attempt to attack the conditions of service of middle managers. Instead, we fight back.

It is a shame that one particular 'association', which purports to represent middle managers but really represents the interests of brigade managers, followed its usual custom of attacking the FBU for taking industrial action to defend its members. If the 40 or so members that this particular organisation represents realised just how submissive their officials were in negotiations with brigade managers, then maybe they would consider returning to the ranks of the only union that can be relied upon to fight to defend the interests of middle managers: the Fire Brigades Union.

I pay tribute to Area Manager Chris Crooks. Chris – a loyal FBU member for many years – was threatened with demotion simply for declining a financial inducement to transfer to the role of deputy assistant commissioner. Instead, he insisted, as was his right, on remaining on Grey Book conditions of service in a nationally-recognised role. He stood firm in the face of threats and intimidation, and I'm glad that the agreed settlement has secured his pay and post until retirement.

Finally, I want to make a special mention about crew manager stars (CM*s). The manner in which our CM* members stood firm in the face of a totally unreasonable threat of a stoppage of pay was truly admirable. If CM*s had succumbed to the intimidation, our entire campaign may have been in peril. But they stuck together and loyally followed the industrial action. It is not an exaggeration to say that every other union member is in the debt of those CM*s who showed such courage. I was also heartened by the way in which FBU members in other roles pledged their solidarity to CM*s and supported the union's campaign for a 'victimisation levy' which would have allowed us to reimburse any lost money.

It is clear now that the issue of the contractual obligations of CM*s must be settled once and for all. The union holds to the view, as we did throughout the dispute, that CM*s are perfectly entitled to relinquish their stars and cannot be forced to act-up. Discussions will commence shortly with the brigade on this very issue. In the event that no agreement is reached by the two sides, the

union reserves the right to pursue the matter through the courts with a view to seeking a legal declaration.

This disagreement over the legal responsibilities of CM*s was never going to be resolved as part of the wider industrial dispute, but we are conscious that members want the matter properly resolved, and we intend to see to it that it is.

In closing, I wish to thank all FBU members for sticking by their union throughout this campaign. We tried to ensure that the campaign was membership-led from the very beginning, and I think we achieved this.

There will undoubtedly be future battles to defend our conditions of service, but if we show the same kind of strength and resolve as we have done in the last few weeks, I have no doubt we will be successful.

Yours fraternally

Ian Leahair

Ian Leahair
Executive Council Member
Fire Brigades Union (London Region)