

# NEWS REPORT



Fire Brigades Union (London Region), John Horner Mews, Frome Street, LONDON N1 8PB. Tel: 020-7359 3638

## DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK AS MAYOR AND COLEMAN ATTEMPT NAKED POWER GRAB

- ★ LFEPA LEADER AND MAYOR IN “GERRYMANDERING” SCANDAL
- ★ AUTHORITY POLITICIANS IN LINE FOR WHOPPING 38% ALLOWANCE HIKE
- ★ COLEMAN’S TRUE AGENDA EXPOSED: “I WANT TO DEFEAT THE FBU ONCE AND FOR ALL”
- ★ UNION READIES MEMBERS FOR PROTEST AT “SHOWDOWN” LFEPA MEETING ON 24 JUNE

**“WHAT WE ARE witnessing is a brazen and quite disgraceful attempt to subvert democracy. Brian**

**Coleman and Boris Johnson are trying to create their own personal fiefdom on LFEPA, and they must not be allowed to get away with it.”**

These were the words yesterday of FBU regional official Paul Embery, as opposition mounted over an audacious attempt by the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and the head of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), Councillor Brian Coleman, to push through contentious plans that would greatly increase the influence of their Tory

group on the authority and marginalise any opposition.

And further pressure was heaped on the pair when it was revealed that LFEPA politicians are set to receive a staggering **38%** increase in personal allowances, despite austerity and cutbacks throughout the rest of the public sector. Their remuneration is set to rocket from £7,662-a-year to £10,597—sometimes for doing no more than turning up to monthly authority meetings.

Johnson is under fire for his decision, supported by authority chief Coleman, to rewrite the rules governing the allocation of LFEPA seats to political parties in such a way that would see the Tories maintain control of the authority, even though, under existing rules, their working majority was wiped out following the May local elections. The FBU is currently considering a legal challenge to this move.

And in documents to be put before the authority’s annual general meeting on 24 June, Coleman advocates a number of further controversial measures designed to cement Tory domination throughout LFEPA.

In a further attack on democracy, Coleman will seek to give himself the future power to halt the presentation of any trade union official addressing an authority meeting if, in the opinion of Coleman himself, the presentation is “unreasonable”. This, says the FBU, is

a shockingly authoritarian measure designed to curtail free speech and silence the voice of the workforce.

Coleman is also proposing to reduce the number of questions that can be asked of him by fellow politicians at authority meetings.

Coleman's attempts to muzzle the FBU take on further significance in light of the unearthing of a radio interview he gave some time ago, before he became the head of LFEPA. In the interview, a recording of which has been passed to the union, Coleman openly expresses his wish to "defeat the FBU once and for all", a comment that will leave London Fire Brigade bosses horrified as they seek to persuade staff that they are genuinely interested in the union's views and prefer collective agreements to confrontation.

Authority member and former assistant chief officer David Cartwright is also facing flak for his decision to join the LFEPA Tory group. Cartwright was appointed by the mayor of London as an "independent", supposedly free of any political party tribalism. By formally linking with the Tories, he stands accused of having been appointed under false pretences.

In addition to the huge hike in the remuneration paid to LFEPA councillors, Coleman is proposing to award himself a £2,300 rise in his own personal allowance for his work on the authority.

The bumper increases leave Coleman open to charges of hypocrisy following his call for a pay freeze for firefighters.

It was only two years ago that Coleman became the beneficiary of a sudden and bountiful £25,000-a-year allowance for his work as chair of the authority. Previous chairs received no financial reward, owing to the fact that, like Coleman, they already earned a generous salary of over £50,000 for their work as members of the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Now his remuneration is set to rocket by an inflation-busting 9%, from £25,944 to £28,898.

Coleman is also seeking to create a new role of deputy leader, a position which will in all likelihood be filled by a Tory ally, and which will cost the authority an extra £21,000-a-year.

Coleman is rewarded handsomely for his numerous other public roles, including his GLA position and his place on Barnet borough council. Last year, the *Evening Standard* reported that he earned around £104,000, making him one of Britain's highest-paid politicians.

He was at the centre of another financial storm two

years ago, after it was revealed that he spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money on taxi fares.

The latest financial scandal could not come at a worse time for the authority, with the storm clouds gathering for an industrial dispute over controversial shift changes.

THE FBU has called a protest lobby for next week's authority meeting, and the latest revelations will fuel firefighters' anger further.

The union's Paul Embery said, "Taken together, the measures which Boris Johnson and Brian Coleman are trying to push through represent a serious attack on democracy and accountability. .

"They are fixing things so that they can dominate LFEPA. The authority itself, its senior positions and its sub-committees will virtually all be under the rule of Councillor Coleman if he gets his way.

"Councillor Coleman's ploy to prevent trade unions addressing authority meetings breaks with years of tradition, and shows beyond question that he and his colleagues couldn't care less about the views of the workforce, over shifts or anything else.

"And the attempt to force through lavish allowance rises for authority politicians is nothing less than despicable, when the rest of the country is being told to tighten its belt and prepare for an era of austerity and cuts.

"We are reaching a critical stage. Politicians, aided by compliant principal officers, seem hell-bent on stirring-up industrial strife in the London Fire Brigade.

"After years of turbulence, firefighters are crying out for a bit of stability. Yet, every day, they have to contend with a regime that seems determined to wreak havoc on the service and drive through changes—such as 12-hour shifts—that are neither in the interests of firefighters nor the wider London community.

"That is why it is crucial that firefighters attend the protest lobby on 24 June. We need to show Councillor Coleman and his allies just how much resistance there is to his plans."



**Log on to  
[london.fbu.org.uk](http://london.fbu.org.uk)  
for all the latest  
news from our  
region**