

**PAY AND CONDITIONS NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE FOR ENGLAND AND WALES** October 2004

Dear Colleagues

The trade union side of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Craft and Associated Employees (JNC) have at last secured a date to meet the Employers Organisation for Local Government in an attempt to find a way forward on craft pay 2004. The two sides of the JNC will meet at 10.30 am on Tuesday 9 November 2004.

Whilst the negotiating process has been subject to many delays, these can be directly attributed to the employers, who have employed all sorts of underhand tactics to stall the pay process.

You will recall that the trade unions have rejected two proposals from the employer's organisation, the first on 4 May 2004 and the second on 25 June 2004. Following the rejection of the employer offers the trade union side called for an end to the employer's antagonistic approach to negotiations. However, to date there is no evidence of a shift in approach.

The trade unions have identified the employer's lack of knowledge of the craft industrial group and craft agreement as a major problem. This lack of knowledge continues to have a detrimental effect on proceedings.

Following a meeting of the JNC Trade Union National Officers in September, the following course of action was decided upon.

1. To reconvene as a matter of urgency a meeting with the employers organisation to seek a resolution to areas of disagreement. Lead national officers from JNC unions to attend. This date has now been set as 9 November 2004.
2. Following the meeting with the employer, and in the event of no agreement being reached, to issue a briefing to all local authority shop stewards so that they can lobby Council Chief Officers, Cabinet Members and Councillors on the craft claim.
3. Each JNC union to hold a national consultative ballot on the employer's full and final offer, stating that rejection will result in a ballot for industrial action.

However, it has come to the attention of the JNC trade unions that the employers negotiating team, that now carries a Tory majority following the last local government elections, has declared that it is the intention to prioritise the end of the craft agreement.

Such statements should concentrate our members' minds on exactly what we are facing. The fact is the particularly early settlement by the local government services group, NJC negotiators (Green Book) of the 3 year deal has enabled the employers side to become more bullish with the smaller craft group and statements of the like we are now hearing should not be a surprise. We will of course with your support protect the craft agreement by all means necessary. We should also be aware there are unions covered by the Green Book that in the past have sought to undermine the craft agreement and would be only too happy to see our agreement absorbed into theirs.

We are not Town Hall workers. Unison members do not have to provide chairs and computers before they commence work. You have to provide and maintain a comprehensive tool kit before commencing work. I believe you hire tools to the employer, something which they undervalue. We have a justified business case for a craft specific pay award. We the craft group in local authorities may be the smaller group but we must not allow the employer to dismiss our craft specific claim.

I hope you will support your Amicus negotiators' stance and be prepared to vote YES for industrial action if necessary. Contractors are no longer a cheap option. You must not allow the employer to underpay and undervalue your skills.

Now more than ever all craftsmen must be prepared to stand together in order to bring a pay increase that your craft skills deserve. Amicus will not allow the employers to dismiss your justified pay claim in the present environment of skills shortages. I am also calling on shop stewards to lobby the meeting in London on 9 November.

Thank you for your support and patience in these protracted negotiations.

