

PAY AND CONDITIONS NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE FOR ENGLAND AND WALES August, 2004

Dear Colleagues

Last week on 29 July 2004, we met with the employers organisation for local government to try to negotiate a realistic pay settlement for local authority craft workers for 2004. All the employers side would offer is the following 3 year pay deal::

April 2004 2.75% April 2005 2.95% April 2006 2.95% or RPI whichever is greater

This offer was previously rejected and the employer has not improved on any element and the employers side keeps reminding us that the NJC (Green Book) negotiators have accepted this offer. This is a frustrating approach the employer is adopting as there is a business case for a justified craft specific pay award.

The employers offer of a 3 year deal which could well be below inflation in year 2 will only add to the skills retention problem. The harsh fact is the local government employers are completely dismissive of our craft workers pay claim. Industrial action is always a last resort however it is with regret that I have to ask you to consult with our members on this issue and please relay the following information to them for consultation.

The Trade Union Side of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Craft and Associated Employees had on the 24th March 2004 submitted a comprehensive pay and conditions claim for council craft building workers. The trade unions have subsequently rejected two proposals from the employer's organisation, the first on the 4th May 2004 and the second on 25th June 2004. In the interim the employers have deliberately delayed proceedings by cancelling meetings at short notice.

Following the rejection of the employer's offer we had hoped that the narrow view approach adopted by the employer would change, however, this is not the case. The truth of the matter is the lead negotiators for the employers side have no knowledge whatsoever of the industrial group they are negotiating with or indeed the content of the craft national agreement. This basic lack of knowledge has become blatantly obvious in our discussions and is having a detrimental effect on the proceedings. We have attempted to set out a constructive way forward but our proposals are constantly met with a negative broad brush NO, with absolutely no explanation whatsoever for the negative response.

Listed below are the employer's response to the main points of the craft claim:

- 7% increase in basic rates for 2004/2005 – **NO**
- Additional low pay supplement of £400.00 for 'Building Labourer' – **NO**
- Consolidation of Guaranteed Minimum Bonus – **NO**
- Commitment on Apprentice Recruitment and Retention, and Pay – **NO**
- Increase in London Weighting - **NO**
- Increase in Tool Insurance - **NO**
- Real increase in Tool Allowance – **NO**
- Reduction in Working Week – **NO**
- Increased Holiday Entitlement – **NO**

The trade union side has proposed that under a three year deal, the employer proposed Year 2 increase of 2.95% be underwritten by a commitment that should RPI give a higher percentage then that level should apply. **With inflation set to rise why would any trade union commit itself to a proposal that could result in a pay cut?**

We have a situation in local government where some craft workers are paid just £240.00 a week basic, but where outside the same worker could earn that in a day and a half, this has to be rectified and it needs to be happening now. Our members are frustrated with the continued undervaluing of their skills and are starting to think that industrial action is the only route to achieving pay that reflects reality.

The joint trade unions are set to meet to discuss the next steps, but we need to clear in the message we send to the local government employer's. Unless there is a change of direction we will have to think seriously about possible industrial action. Please let your AMICUS local regional officer know how the members feel about the prospect of industrial action.

The proposals from the employer continue to ignore the nature of the craft claim, it is not a general claim and we refuse to allow the employer to bolt craft workers pay and conditions onto the Local Government Services deal (Green Book).

John Allott

