

# Rhondda Cynon Taf – GMB - News

## Pension Special – March 2005

The biggest issue in Local Government at the moment is the 'Pensions Review', which all trade unions including the **GMB** are opposed to in its current form therefore most of this edition of our news letter is to express where we in **RCT** stand on the matter, we shall try and explain the proposals simply, in the hope of encouraging all our members to unite and involve yourselves in our campaigns so that we may obtain the best possible compromise now and for our future. I was as disappointed as everyone else at first when I was told the **GMB** was **not going to ballot** for strike on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March like our colleagues in UNISON & T&G, however having listened to the arguments for **NOT** calling strike at this time I am persuaded it is the right and proper decision.

The new **Labour** controlled cabinet has been our employers for almost a year now, and in that time I have had opportunity to get to know and work with many of its elected members, already we are seeing changes being implemented as was there manifesto pledge, e.g. improvements in street cleansing that is having a good response from the community and hopefully will continue as even more resources are put into this section, for me the most encouraging change is the **Labour Group's pledge that all council services being provided at present will be kept 'In House'**.

Over the last year I have seen many changes which have affected the way many of you work, and I foresee a very busy time ahead as our employer implements harmonisation in its attempt to bring stability and job security whilst providing the best possible service. I also have had to accept changes in my own working environment as a result of relocating from Aberdare to the new **GMB** office in Pontypridd.

As this is a '**pensions special**' I close by reminding all our members that our employers as with many other authority's across the country are as concerned and have their reservations regarding the proposed changes to our pension which is being forced upon Local Government by Westminster, therefore I hope that we in the **GMB** will be able to encourage all other trade unions to work with those supporting councillors & political activists and together we might obtain a satisfactory result in this matter, with minimum disruption to our community.

**Richy Dally**  
**Branch Secretary**

### Welcome to our new members

During June our full time officer Gareth Morgan organized a very successful recruitment campaign in the Taff area, with the help of volunteer activists he managed to get out and introduce himself to many of you in the work place and increase our membership. I trust every one that joined at that time have now received their membership number and welcome pack, which gives full details of all the other additional advantages you get by becoming part of the **GMB** family. We were also the best performing branch in the region for recruitment in this last quarter.

### "Did you know???"

One in every three people employed in Wales is working in the Public Sector (Local Authority, Health Authority, or Civil Service, etc).

The average pension for a council employee is a meagre £3,800 per annum, National Health workers fair a little better with the average in there scheme being £4,300.

People are living on average 7 years longer however at the lower end of the pay scale manual workers life expectancy has not increased for many years.

Tony Blair is set to get a generous £175,000 pension thanks to his colleague Gordon Brown who is the man determined to make huge savings in the all ready meagre pensions we currently receive. Despite over **120** Back Bench Politicians signing an 'Early Day Motion' opposing the recommended changes to our pension entitlements the government is determined to bring the 1<sup>st</sup> stage changes into our scheme by the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

**Our Pension is ours!** We all have worked for many years with the pension agreement being an integral part of our terms & conditions of employment, therefore everyone of us must make our stand so as to protect what is ours by right. The proposed future changes in our pension scheme would see the average pension for a Refuse worker fall from the current £6,000 to just £4,000 per year.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES PENSION CHANGES**

The Government is determined to make significant changes to all Public Services Schemes in order to maintain their long term viability, all the trade unions are in agreement that there is going to have be modification in order to secure stability of pensions, as we recognise life expectancy is increasing which in turn is a strain on any pension agreement. However unlike the Government **we don't believe** there is such urgency to railroad the change without fair and proper negotiation.

The Government has all ready laid regulations before Parliament to make some amendments to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which is almost certainly going to be implemented on the 1<sup>st</sup> April this year.

These changes are:-

Raising the minimum pension age from **50** to **55**, this will be required in all public service schemes but is implemented one year sooner in LGPS.

Removing the '85 year rule' (an exclusive privilege in LGPS), for the new joiners and phasing it out for all existing members.

**These are the only changes planned for 2005 and still the subject of consultation with the office of the Deputy Prime Minister.**

### **What OUR Branch Executive Say?**

The imminent changes for April would affect very few of our members indeed if any at all, we believe the raising of the pension age is inevitable all we can hope to achieve is a one year delay by our protesting. The abolition of the '85 year rule' is a harder pill to swallow however this rule has been more or less redundant in **RCT**, being always granted at the discretion of the fund holders we are unaware of anyone in the last years that have been granted this privilege. Should we win the argument to keep this rule we suspect the government would only use pressure to ensure the administrators of LGPS apply there restrictions even more rigorously.

We know our employer **RCT** is sympathetic to our concerns regarding future changes to our pensions as is many Politician and lay political party activists, therefore our energy would be better spent working with these people to raise awareness of what is being forced through by Parliament and seek to gain better public support.

There are many other routes we can take before strike action which if organised correctly could be just as effective without causing unnecessary disruption to our community that will undoubtedly affect the more vulnerable in society.

We do reserve the right to ballot for strike but only after an exhaustive effort that fails to win any compromise and nearer to the intended day in **2008** when most of the significant changes would come into effect, we would then be standing arm in arm with all other Public Sector Workers, e.g. Health Service, Civil Service, Prison Service, etc. who will be in the same predicament. Read on for some of our branches proposed demonstrations and come and support us in your fight, we would welcome your ideas for any action that might be effective.

**THIS FIGHT SHOULD NOT BE WITH OUR EMPLOYER OR THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE BUT WITH THE GOVERNMENT DIRECTLY.**

### **Mike Payne's (Regional Officer)**

#### **"7 reasons why strike is unnecessary at this time!"**

The **GMB** has taken the decision **not to ballot** its members at this moment in time for the following reasons:-

Discussions are ongoing with the office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and until these are exhausted then the **GMB** will not be carrying out a ballot.

The current changes are of a minor nature, with the major changes not planned until **2008** that's another three years for negotiation.

The Government have agreed to provide protections for existing employees with regards the 85 year Rule.

The Government have agreed to set up a negotiating group nationally that will involve, **GMB** National Negotiators, Civil Servants and Government Ministers and they will re-look at the proposals planned for 2008.

We continue to lobby MP's and AM's to support the **GMB's** aims of providing a decent Pension for all Local Government Workers.

If substantial changes are not made to the current proposals for 2008 then the **GMB** will reserve the right to Ballot its members with the view to take industrial action at the appropriate time in support of there Pension Rights.

The **GMB** will not take its members out on strike until it is appropriate and in their best interests. The other NJC Trade Unions must do what they think is best but the **GMB** believes that it is premature to take strike action before discussions have been completed.

### **The Branches Battle Strategy Over Pensions**

Write to John Phillips (Regional Senior Organiser) copy to Brian Strutton (National Officer for Public Services) asking with urgency for an action plan should other unions come out on strike on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, and to lay out our rights & protection, and **GMB** recommendations regarding non crossing of picket lines and lock outs.

Executive Committee to seek a meeting with **RCT Labour Group**, to gain there support and raise better awareness of the issue.

To encourage as many people as possible to write a letter to there MP protesting against change without negotiation, an example draft letter enclosed with this edition.

Encourage as many people as possible to block MP's surgeries and express fears over their pensions.

To organise a branch rally to picket at Labours Swansea Conference either 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> March, we will also try and get an 'Emergency Resolution' tabled for this conference. Placards dedicated for the pensions battle already prepared and available at Regional Office. Consider targeting Polling Stations with small group pickets come Election Day.

\*\*\*\*\***NEWS IN BRIEF**\*\*\*\*\*

**Refuse**

Praise to those shopstewards & operatives who cooperated with Nigel Wheeler & his team in the re-engineering of rounds, in hand with this new strategy comes a fairer pay system for drivers & loaders. The long awaited 'Harmonisation' is in final stages for refuse and we eagerly await the managements proposals too see if the package is democratically acceptable.

**Cleansing**

The recent street blitz strategy has been a great success resulting in additional finance into the department to creating 24 new permanent posts, I hope that our members on temporary or casual contracts will succeed at interview for these jobs, and there should also be additional seasonal employment for the usual summer duties. As with refuse we are looking forward to reviewing the proposed 'Harmonisation' package.

**Vehicle Maintenance**

The now Labour controlled Authority has announced an ambitious plan to move away from fleet hire and purchase all its own vehicles and they have pledged where possible to keep all the maintenance 'In House'. 48 new refuse vehicles being the first faze already ordered and expected later in the year, other fleet vehicles being phased in over the next few years at great expense as there are some 300 or more vehicles from box vans to large gritting lorries involved. The fitters at Ystrad depot are in the process of developing new shift patterns in anticipation of the additional work as we really do want to keep this extra maintenance 'In House'.

**Leisure**

'Harmonisation' has not progressed as expected, however new staffing levels and working practices are now in place and we hope to get our temporary and casual staff slotted in to more secure contracts soon, the branch believes progression forward is now with a better more positive attitude.

**Human Resources**

A significant change in structure of this area brings all the divisional offices back into the direct control of the corporate department, therefore we hope that this will resolve the inconsistency in which our members from different sections were being treated as the divisions administered issues such as sickness, disciplinary, and recruitment slightly differently to each other.

**Re-Cycling (Coedcae Lane)**

The GMB has had exclusive opportunity to work with management in developing for the future of this department; needless to say we are encouraging the move towards a more permanent location for expansion, and pressing for all those temporary agency drivers, loaders and operatives to be given the security of more permanent employment within the authority.

**Highways**

The GMB is concerned of the ongoing unfairness with as many as four different terms of conditions running consecutively, and we hope management will announce a date shortly where we can enter into the early stages of 'Harmonisation & Restructure' negotiations.

**Education & Catering**

The GMB is determined to obtain the best possible deal for our non teaching staff during the changes that are coming into effect regarding teachers work loads.

Changes in the way supply and the preparation of food is undertaken in both education as well as the care sector has to be reviewed, and we are expecting hard political decisions to be made that will safe guard the future of our 'In House' catering services.

**THE ENCLOSED DRAFT LETTER**

We urge all our members to put your name & address together with the name of your MP on to the enclosed draft letter, sign it and return it to our office in Pontypridd, we will then forward them on to Westminster. Alternatively you may wish to write your own or send it directly to your MP, **but please make your feelings known.**

**Join The GMB Today!**

With a possibility of strike imminent everyone needs the protection of a Trade Union therefore why not get prepared and sign up for your own security & peace of mind. The **GMB** offers advice & protection as well as many other benefits.

Call in and see **Rose** in our office at **Taff Street Pontypridd** or call her on **01443 491959** for more information and an application form.

**Caretaker/Handyman** have been receiving general enquiries lately regarding handyman duties? Such enquiries have not been straight forward to address. Firstly we have to ask where the demarcation line between 'handyman' repairs and craftsmanship is! e.g. even if you felt competent to tackle electrical faults you would not dare attempt such in a public building unless you had the relevant electrical qualifications, however when it comes to carpentry, painting or glazing its not so easy to define. Our advice is to evaluate your own competence with the task you undertake, and consider Health & Safety implications. Emphasise to your manager your lack in confidence with any task and if you consider it a short term temporary repair make your opinions known. If you are asked to redo the same repair time again then specify you will undertake the repair one last time and will expect a trade man to be employed to make good and permanent, at this stage you can ask your trade union rep for support. If you are unable to complete a task safely, close off the area and report your failure to finish the job immediately.

**Computer users**

Do you work at a computer station that is linked to the **RCT** intranet system? Well you can now download an electronic version of this newsletter, and keep up to date with our activities by 'clicking' on the **GMB** icon on the home page. Lyn Evans our convenor in the Rhondda area is also compiling an e-mail database to keep our members up to date. If you would like to be put on the e-mailing list send your electronic address to:- [lyn.evans@rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk](mailto:lyn.evans@rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk)

## CHANGES IN THE BRANCH

### Election of Branch Vice President

The branch appointed Phil Shelton to the post at the September meeting, we wish him well and are confident that he will become a good help to Christine our branch Chair. Phil takes over from Gordon Lewis who remains very active within the branch continuing in his roll of 'minute' secretary, our link to the Rhondda Ward Labour Party, and our officer for 'retired & retiring' members. Many of you in the Rhondda area will remember Gordon from his time as Branch Secretary in the old Rhondda Borough until his retirement.

### New Branch Health & Safety Liaison Officer

Since Martin Price's resignation from the position as a result of his promotion within cleansing, we have been waiting for the right member to come forward and fill this position, we are now pleased to report that **Craig Jones** our rep at **Llantrisant Leisure Centre** has agreed to take on this responsibility. The branch believes he is the ideal candidate as he has always demonstrated an interest in **H&S** and attended the lower stages of this course. We will encourage him to take full advantage of the employer's facility time to obtain further training in this field so that he will be better equipped to put our membership representation forward at a corporate level, which now becomes his responsibility.

### New Convenor in the Cynon Valley

Jeff Evans our shop steward for Cleansing in the Cynon was unanimously promoted into this position at our last AGM, as the attending members recognised his keen interest for fair representation for all. Jeff takes over from Andrew Morgan, who has gone over to the employer side having successfully won his seat to council in the last elections. Andrew is now the Labour Councillor for Mountain Ash West Ward.

### Change of venue for branch meeting.

During the summer we had to find a new meeting place therefore all future meeting will be held at Abercynon Rugby Football Club. Remember stewards there is a meeting on the **last Wednesday of every month 7pm to 9pm**. Branch quarterly meetings will also be held at this location lookout for workplace posters advertising meetings. We encourage all our members to participate so why not take the first step and attend a meeting. You can call Mark our 'Equality Officer' and he will arrange to meet you beforehand or try and help with transport.

## Equal Rights Section – Mark Bowler

With the recent changes within the GMB structure, our campaigns on equality issues have slowed a little, probably due to those good full time officers that took advantage of early retirement opportunities, and a settling in period required for others taking up new responsibilities.

Our project on Domestic Violence is still running and gaining much ground, we see from recent news reports how vast this problem is with estimates of 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men being possible victims. GMB is aiming to make this issue open in the work place so that we become more aware of these repulsive and cowardly forms of bullying, GMB encourages victims to seek confidential support and overcome their problems at the earliest opportunity. *"Don't continue to be a victim but get help"* is our message; and we have good facilities with our employer, RCT. to meet in working time to help with such enquiries and to consider possible options in uttermost confidence.

October saw the introduction of new disability access legislation which will eventually affect the way we all consider other people and make it easier for everyone to get equal service from all business or organisations despite any disability that a person has. The law now insists that all reasonable changes must be made to assist people with disabilities to gain the same access to services more independently, and this very often only requires us able body persons to gain a better understanding of that little extra assistance needed without becoming patronizing, we should then look to make those simple adjustments.

December 2003 saw the introduction of new Employment Equality Regulations, which strengthens people's rights regarding religion or belief. The regulations also covers sexual orientation and for the first time gives legal rights to Gays & Lesbians in the work place, though RCT has always had very good anti-discrimination policy in these areas. I can appreciate it is not always easy coming forward to request such assistance. The TUC is now in the process of setting up training courses in this legislation for employers, trade union officers & activists so that together we can overcome any possible discrimination.

Proposed changes to our pension offer some protection for the lower paid but I dare say it will be part time women workers that will remain nearest the pension poverty line, however a recent GMB victory now allows part time workers that were prevented access to the scheme years ago the opportunity to purchase "those" years back - something I'd strongly recommend each of you to look into.

Should you like help or further information on any of the above issues you can give me a call on **07974 108723** *you won't have to give your name?*