

# Rhondda Cynon Taf Public Services Branch Newsletter **- SUMMER 2006 -**



South Western Region  
R45 Rhondda Cynon Taff Branch  
PENSIONS UPDATE

## Termination of School Catering Contract

The branch is disappointed with the actions of 'Catering Direct' and their determination to terminate the 'Contracts of Employment' of all our colleagues in school catering. The authority has been in consultation with staff and the unions involved these past months but unfortunately have failed to come to any satisfactory compromise.

The GMB together with the majority of staff involved appreciate that changes were necessary to try and overcome the continuing budgetary deficit that the department is occurring; however we disagree that the imposed changes to our members contract's is the only option, and believe that some of our members are going to suffer too much of a financial loss for the present stance to be acceptable. Therefore from the early stages we obtained the advice of the union's solicitors regarding the implications and possible action for redress. As a result of the legal advice received we informed our members to sign the new contracts under duress in order to safe guard the immediate future of their jobs and extend the time we have to either obtain a more favourable deal or take a more proactive approach as necessary.

The Regional Office has put resources into a consultation project in order that we visit every school kitchen in the borough and obtain the opinion of as many of our members as possible and the results from this exercise indicate we would have the overwhelming mandate to pursue with more formal industrial action.

The branch notes that by the council's action in terminating predominantly women's contracts they have forced the GMB to pursue 'equal pay claims', despite the ongoing 'job evaluation exercise' which it was hoped would have eventually brought an amicable resolve to this issue.

It is still hoped that the employer will come forth with an acceptable compromise to the imposed contracts before the start of the next school term, and that no member would suffer excessive detriment with out fair compensation; on your behalf we are prepared to negotiate for the best deal for the collective majority so long as no individual member is neglected of any reasonable recompense.

If you have ever doubted the reasons of paying into a Trade Union movement, then the ongoing dispute and the continuous battle that the National Joint Union negotiators are engaged in at the moment to get the best possible protection and improvement to the pension benefits should be justification enough that your participation in our trade union is an essential element to maintaining a good and fair quality to life.

Negotiations are still on going and the Trade Unions are looking to significant improvements to many of the benefits in replacement to the 85 year rule should we loose it! At the moment we are awaiting a Judicial Review lodged on behalf of the Joint trade union group in the hope that we can get this removal imposed by the employer quashed. If this final attempt fails then our negotiators are already in discussions with the new government department (Department for Communities and Local Government) that has the responsibility for developing a new pension scheme, and they have some pretty big demands!

For example:-

- Improvements to the accrual rate, so we can build a better fund for ourselves.
- Improvements to the accrual reduction factors, so that anyone wishing to retire before 65 would suffer a smaller reduction in pension than is available at present.
- Extending partner pensions to include unregistered partners whether same sex or unmarried.
- Better death in service benefits.
- Means to encourage more low paid members into the scheme.
- Improved arrangements for 'admitted body status', should our jobs ever go to the private sector.

The day of action was very much a success in as much that the DCLG and Employers Association are now in active talks with the Unions, and the hope that we will have a fair and worthy scheme for our future retirement.

**GMB -Full time membership for as little as £2.30 per wk**  
*Working Under 21 hours - Only £1.23*

## Skin Care & Sunshine

The GMB has a national drive on H&S and getting employers to recognise their responsibilities in putting the necessary protection in place to protect outdoor workers from getting skin cancer. The branch has taken up the challenge with RCT and was surprised that there is no policy or corporate guide lines available therefore it will be one of the items on the agenda at the next H&S committee meeting. However in the mean time we will be referring to the GMB guidelines in an attempt to obtain better protection for our members who are unable to avoid the damaging effects of constant sun exposure whilst at work.

There are over 1,500 deaths from skin cancer in the UK every year and the number is still rising it is believed that 90% of these deaths are preventable and early diagnoses can lead to successful treatment.

GMB says, that as the risk is foreseeable there is a duty on employers to bring in preventative and protective measures to help protect its workforce, we consider reasonable measures to include :-

- More efficient planning of tasks out of the hottest times of the day between 11:00 am and 3:00 pm.
- Job task rotation wherever possible.
- Provision of shade, if practicable.
- PPE - providing of adequate headgear and loose clothing, we also believe access to and the provision of sun screen of at least factor 15 reasonable.
- Advice to the workforce on sun protection should be given as part of normal H&S training, which should include information on regular skin checks for unusual spots or moles.

If you can answer yes to any of the following questions then you need to be particularly vigilant so as you don't get sun burnt!

1. Do you burn easily?
2. Do you have moles or freckles?
3. Has anyone in your family had skin cancer?

Traditionally most employers in the UK have not supplied skin protection from the sun. However if a 'Risk Assessment' identifies a risk from a particular hazard (i.e. potential skin cancer from exposure to the sun) then the employer has a duty to eliminate which is not practical so then reduce the risk which is possible by introducing protective measures. Therefore if you believe you are at risk get your relevant management group to assess the risk of sunlight exposure and to act on their responsibility of doing everything reasonable to reduce the effects of radiation.

## "How much progress have we made?"

Here is an extract from 'Tony Benn Diaries' (which is one of the best reads in our libraries) recorded when he arrived at Gaza (Israel) railway station whilst a young man in his early 20s and an officer in the RAF.

"We wandered up and down the platform and were attracted by the quantity of lavatories. There was one for British officers, one for nursing sisters, one for women officers and one for Indian officers, and separate ones again for women other ranks, British other ranks and South African other ranks - *class distinction par excellence.*"

Many still believe that this kind of segregation exists within RCT and it's true to say that we must do more to redress the inequalities in communications as one example whereby the manual worker is disadvantaged.

Needless to say that the 'privy' at CCTV has the only gold fittings and seat warmers! Of course this can be attributed to the excellent representation of our GMB shopsteward Phil Shelton, an example to us all.

If you want to see improvements in your area of employment then why not work with us by becoming a GMB shopsteward, we can send you on some excellent training sessions so as to build your confidence and arm you with the necessary information and skills to become a good negotiator. We have already reached agreement with the employer so as you get the required paid time out.

For more information or to express your interest call into the office or telephone 01443 490891.

### INCREASE IN CONTRIBUTIONS

*As from 1st October, there will be a 5p weekly increase to all membership.*

*This a small increase agreed by your delegation at Congress to ensure we continue to provide a full service.*

"Why do we get harassed over our sickness!  
'After all' we are entitled to a very good scheme  
as set out in our 'Terms & Conditions'?"

A recent article in a free newspaper caught my eye and opened my understanding.

Though the number of days lost through 'sickies' have dropped to its lowest level in almost 20 years, there is still a recognized culture of absenteeism in existence in many workplaces and the article referred to 164 million days lost last year alone costing the British economy more than £13 billion, it was sad but expected reading on, I learn that we in the Public Sector on average take a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> higher level of sickness than employees in private organizations.

A 'Confederation of British Industries' study revealed that £1 billion of tax payer's money could be saved by just reducing our level of sickness to similar levels of the Private Sector; last year the Public Sector employee took an average of 8½ days sick while the Private Sector workers averaged only 6 days. We must admit that's a sad indictment on our integrity especially given that we in the Public Sector have far more holiday entitlement than most.

**There again could it be as result of excess pressure that is put on us to meet unrealistic targets?**

**Changes in 'Street Care'**

The branch sends congratulations to all those who recently received promotion in this division as a result of the ongoing development of its structure. We wish everyone well and trust that you all have the wisdom, capability and the opportunity to build up the morale of the workforce which we recognise to be at a low ebb.

We are particularly looking forward to seeing a quick and successful development in the 'Enforcement' section that will hopefully alleviate a little of the pressure that the cleansing operatives are enduring.

We too believe that cleaner streets can lead to a happier and more prosperous environment and are pleased to see the determination of this authority and the controlling **Labour group** in using the full strength of the 'Clean Neighbourhood Bill' together with the 'Environmental Protection Act' to awaken the whole community to our individual responsibilities for protecting and improving the area which we live in.

**Recycling within RCT**

I believe all areas of the borough is now covered by the 'Recycling' initiative which is working towards the sustainable protection of our environment and as an outcome have provide much needed employment in our community.

If you have not yet got into the discipline of recycling your waste then the branch urges you to take your responsibility in this cause seriously. Remember the more we recycle the more potential job opportunities we might create! Though have a heart for those that are working in this department as it's not the best of employment sorting through other peoples waste all day long, however we can help to make it cleaner by first washing and crushing what we can before we put it in the recycle bag. If you generate a lot of waste then the workforce would appreciate you separating the different materials using multiple bags for plastic, glass, etc. So next time you go to the dustbin think first of the potential jobs you could be protecting by recycling, as I'm sure we all would rather see our council tax spent on local employment instead of wasted in European fines for land fill dumping! And who knows were the next sites will be located? "Not in my bag yard please" though as European legislation gets tough this will be the only option open to local authorities.

So lets all make that effort and start reducing our refuse with urgency.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Housing Stock Transfer

In principal the GMB is opposed to such outsourcing of Council Housing and have sent activists to lobby at Westminster to try and secure an alternative option indeed we will remain very much proactive against such a National policy in the hope that the Government would change heart and adopt the '4<sup>th</sup> option'.

However the branch has to recognise that time is running out for RCT and we have sympathy with the Authorities predicament of a substantial budget deficit and understand that Council Members were forced to make a decision on this issue by way of the best 'rescue' package that they believe to be most appropriate from what is currently available. Therefore we have taken the decision not to put any proactive opposition to the 'Community Mutual Trust' initiative within RCT, but rather to cooperate with the council to ensure that as many of our Housing Division employees will keep their jobs, and if the transfer progresses that all terms under TUPE should be honoured together with fighting for 'Admitted Body' Status to our pension be adopted.

## Vision Products

The branch welcomes the many new members recently picked up in this in-house department that makes special provision to employ those with registered disabilities in our community. We are aware that there is several workplace issues you wish addressed, and we hope to meet with management in the near future. We would be encouraged by your workplace and branch involvement; so if there is any members keen to take up such challenge, why not start by coming to our Monthly meetings.

## Homecare

The full time officers are hoping to organise a rally in the very near future so as to identify any concerns our members may have and discuss your reservations with 'Job Evaluation'.

## Highways

We are looking forward to the immanent completion of the 'Harmonisation' exercise believing that the management package will be acceptable to the vast majority.

## ONGOING ISSUES

**Coaches & Instructors** - we are still trying to agree an acceptable resolve to 'Rates and the Back Payments'.

**Refuse & Cleansing** - Two issues still to be resolved, that is the 'Bank Holiday' back payments and we are also trying to reduce the 2 year qualifying period to 1 for any temporary employee too automatically claim a full time post.

**Recycling** - We know that there is disappointment that we have not been able to reach a 'Harmonisation' agreement but we believe that the current 'Job Evaluation' process will automatically bring about a satisfactory conclusion to this issue.

## Assistant Secretary

### Secondment

The branch would like to thank Mark for all the help he has given to Richy in the running of the branch these past months; however it is now time for Mark to return to his substantive post in 'Street Care'. Therefore we welcome Craig Jones our branch Heath & Safety Officer who is taking up the challenge on a full time secondment for the next 6 months. The branch is grateful to the Leisure Services Division for releasing Craig especially knowing the difficulties it has created in finding a replacement for the centre managers 'blue eyed boy'.

### The Recent Shop Stewards Training

The recent in house training in 'Grievance & Disciplinary Procedures' was considered an overwhelming success, the branch wishes to give thanks to Clive James the Regional Training Officer for organising what was a very informative and motivating 2 day session that helped stewards to gain additional confidence in preparing for such procedures.

If you are a steward and missed out on this session and would like to be on the next course then register your interest with Richy as soon as possible.

## Job Evaluation - Lyn Evans

'Job Evaluation' is continuing within RCT and is operating to a very tight timescale in order for it's completion to meet the dates set down in the 2005/2007 'National Pay Agreement'. Some of you will have already been involved, either as a unique post holder or contributing to a colleague's questionnaire and will already be aware of the process and how helpful the analysts are in assisting people in the completing of questionnaires. It is difficult to give precise times as to when individual departments will be reviewed in this ongoing process; however we believe progress is on schedule at the 'JE Office' in order that all generic jobs within the various departments are looked at within the projected timescales.

If you are selected as part of the evaluation process (*One of the lucky 10%*) and would require some help with your questionnaire, then speak to your local GMB rep who should have received some training to be of assistance, if not they will be able to organize or put you in touch with someone who can provide the support.

We truly understand that forms can be difficult or intimidating! Therefore don't be afraid to **ask for all the help in completing your form as and when you need it.**

## TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Richy Dally 01443 490891  
Craig Jones 07812 097768

*All correspondence to:-*

**R45 - RCT Branch GMB  
28e Taff Street  
PONTYPRIDD CF37 4TR**