

LIVEWIRE

New Company Agreement HARMONISATION . . .

MANWEB have ignored the overwhelming opposition of staff across the company and are proposing

- * Saturday as a normal working day.
- * Late nights 'til 8pm as a normal working day.

Even the one off payments for those staff affected are to be subject to review.

Despite assurances that all rostas would be agreed, the agreement states "the overriding consideration is the needs of the business and the requirements of the customers".

The common feeling expressed by staff has been:

- Saturday and Late Night work must be voluntary.
- All unsocial hours must attract premium payments.

Call out fees, normal day off fees, unsocial hours fees and Saturday fees are all to be abolished. The



Would you sign it without reading the small print?

. . . or COST CUTTING EXERCISE

only guarantee is a minimum 2 hours overtime pay for those on standby. This in the year MANWEBs profits are forecast to exceed £100M.

If the Nat. Grid Co., jointly owned by all the REC's can afford single hour and other premium payments, why can't MANWEB!

FLEXITIME

The company have yet to publicly confirm that the existing Flexitime agreements will definitely continue into the new agreement. The only reference in the agreement is that Flexitime MAY be agreed for DISCREET groups of staff.

The company must be forced

back to the negotiating table to reconsider the issues outlined above. A massive REJECTION of the offer by members would demonstrate the depth of feeling and act as a warning of the hornet's nest which would be stirred up if they tried to impose the existing offer without agreement.

EQUAL PAY SNUB

Hundreds of clerical staff who stood to gain increases of up to £3,500 as a result of legal victories in NALGO's Equal Pay Campaign are likely to make only minor gains if at all. Instead of bringing up clerical staff to the level of equivalent industrial staff, MANWEB are to lengthen the pay progression for equivalent industrial jobs.

ACAS ABANDONDED

The right of reference to ACAS which has been available in the disciplinary agreements of industrial staff and which NALGO have sought for clerical staff is not to be available for any staff.

In the much lauded new "competitive market" environment the right of appeal to an independent outside body which has the power to reinstate a sacked staff member is the only guarantor we have of some degree of justice in disciplinary matters.

REPRESENTATION RESTRICTED

MANWEB are refusing to keep the right to choose a "representative of your own choice" in disciplinary or capability procedures. This attempt to exclude experienced or senior branch officers from representing members could well leave some of the most vulnerable members often facing victimisation without adequate support.

PETROL ALLOWANCES SLASHED

Hundreds of staff who travel on Company business will be short changed by cuts of up to 66% in petrol allowances. The current public transport rate of 22p is set to be the norm for most occasional users, with casual users only being entitled to 33p – even for the largest engined cars.

Performance Related Pay

Increments are currently subject to "satisfactory service" and are therefore normally only withheld at certain capability or disciplinary hearings. The New agreements propose increments be subject to "satisfactory performance". It is not hard to imagine in the era of appraisals and "performance related pay" that this minor wording change could represent a very significant policy change!! Is it a coincidence that the company recently launched a new staff appraisal scheme with "performance ratings"?

WHAT WOULD

ALLOWANCES ABOLISHED

All allowances are to be abolished. All claims for meal, travel and hotel expenses incurred on any company business will not only have to be supported by receipts but will only be paid where your local manager considers it reasonable. With all managers under pressure to cut costs, staff could well end up contributing to expenses incurred on company business.

In other words – reasonable expenses will be paid and Management will decide what's reasonable.

YOU LOSE!

PROBATIONARY PERIOD

MANWEB want to introduce the right to be able to sack anyone within the first 6 months of their employment without reference to any procedure and without appeal.

This would be a major set-back to the rights of representation and flouts even the most basic principles of natural justice. It would introduce and would almost certainly be used by some managers as a source of expendible, cheap, compliant labour.

GENERAL AVAILABILITY

A new clause has been added which proposes that those not on standby are expected and may be required in emergency circumstances to be called into work.

Although staff have always been very

willing to come into work to deal with genuine emergencies, and have received premium payments by way of compensation, it has never been a contractual obligation.

By putting such a clause into the agreement places an

unacceptable burden on staff who could potentially face disciplinary action for breach of contract if they are not available for emergency work at all times.

In the strict regime of the future the definition of an "emergency situation" could take on a whole new meaning.

Local Joint Machinery Abolished

All local negotiatory and consultative machinery is to be abolished. The only structures below the Company Joint Council will be "Local Forums". These bodies have no formal structures, no fixed make-up or constitution and do not have to keep minutes. However, these Forums can make binding decisions about all changes to the hours, rostars, Flexitime and other working arrangements of staff in that unit. With a multitude of small units in each location many staff could find themselves without any adequate representation on issues which are of critical importance.

NEW LOW PAY BANDS

New low pay bands with a top rate of £8,900 after 10 years are being proposed for certain jobs. This while Directors are introducing ever increasingly high pay bands for themselves.

SHOPS

The decision by the AGM of our branch in November 1992 marked a watershed in the negotiations on the future of MANWEB shops. A resolution proposing a ballot on industrial action if shops were separated from the main business was passed almost unanimously, at one of the largest AGMs for 20 years.

Within a few weeks the Company announced its intention to keep the whole of the shop operations with the main business and indeed make them the focus of the new customer service strategy by setting them up as customer service centres.

If this is a serious strategy it is therefore rather surprising that, whilst including shop staff in the main agreement, a series of exceptions are being written up, which look rather like an even poorer version of the present controversial Schedule 'B' Conditions.

Whilst important guarantees on comparable grades and starting salaries have been won, this is undermined by the abolition of Saturday fees, call-out fees, normal day off fees, the barely veiled threat of compulsory overtime, the introduction of bonus related pay and to all intents and purposes a 38 hour week.

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Whatever attraction bonuses may have as an apparent "top-up" to existing salaries it could rapidly become a much larger proportion of take home pay, leaving shop staff even more subject than at present to the vagaries of the market place.

If Trading can break even last year at the height of one of the biggest recessions this century, on the basis of current payments, and without the extra £400,000 creditcare income expected annually from next year. There appears no justification for the introduction of such a harsh regime from those at the sharp end of customer service.

Who runs the ballot

Not content with trying to gag trade union opposition and muzzle opponents of the Company's so called "Final Offer", MANWEB want to run the ballot too!!

This "charitable" offer would be laughable if it was not for the fact that certain Full Time officials are actually toying with the idea of accepting the proposal.

Perhaps some "professional" union leaders need a light refresher in the A...B...C... of trade unionism. Many members find it incredible that union officials could even give consideration to a proposal which compromises the most fundamental of principles, that of independence from the employer.

It would be a dangerous illusion to imagine that MANWEB are prepared to part with thousands of pounds for a ballot out of the goodness of their hearts. The fact that the Electoral Reform Society would be contracted to organise and count the vote is not

STATEMENT FROM HEAD OFFICE STEWARDS

We believe that the Company's 'Final Offer' on the new agreement is unacceptable in its present form. The Company want to be free to campaign for the agreement without opposition. The muting of the independent voice of the trade unions only plays into the hands of the company. There is even talk about a COMPANY BALLOT instead of union ballots of members.

Believing the proposed package to be a major setback to the overall terms and conditions of employment of our members we resolve to use all means available to campaign for rejection of the current package.

the issue.

It is the decision about who votes, how the ballot papers are worded, the timetable for balloting and "ownership" of the results that are the crucial issues.

The trade unions must be united in their stance. Each union should organise its own ballot. If the company want to run their own ballot we should ensure it is subjected to a widespread boycott campaign. Not only is this necessary to remind the Company that the unions run their own affairs, but it will prevent any attempt by MANWEB to muddy the waters with a Company staff ballot which undoubtedly would include non-union members.

The views and opinions expressed in LIVEWIRE are not necessarily those of the MANWEB NALGO Branch