

Issue 6
July 95

Livewire

PAY 1995 - MEMBERS TO DECIDE

This has been the most difficult year for pay negotiations since local bargaining commenced following the privatisation of the Industry.

Your claim tabled on 19th January this year sought to improve the pay scales for the lowest paid in Manweb by arguing for a consolidated flat rate payment of £150 to be

included in the pay. Unfortunately the company rejected this offering only a 2.5% increase plus a one-off payment of £150 with strings.

After the staff side rejected this the Company tabled their final offer of 3.5% on all scheduled salaries with strings which the Trade Unions still could not recommend to you, and a consultative ballot was held. The result of that ballot was a 57% return with 60% of those voting rejecting the offer from the Company.

The Staff Side of the Manweb Joint Council met on 20th June last to consider what action to take given the ballot result. After holding discussions with the Company's representatives on that day, and being informed by them that the Company would not improve the offer, the staff side agreed to ask each constituent union to seek

authority to hold an Industrial Action ballot. These ballots would be in support of improved increases to pay and allowances **with no strings**. The full time officers were asked to meet the Company before the next meeting of the Staff Side.

Your Branch Executive, on 27 June, gave full consideration to the ballot result and membership reaction to the prospect of Industrial Action, and felt unable to recommend that an Industrial Action ballot be undertaken. This decision was communicated to the Staff Side at its meeting on 4th July 1995.

However at a meeting with John Roberts and representatives of Human Resources minor changes were made to this years pay offer (including the removal of strings) subject to acceptance of a two year pay deal which guarantees a pay increase in line with inflation next year plus a one off bonus of 0.5% of salary or £75, whichever is the higher.

At the time of writing Unison representatives have agreed that the offer will be put union members as the best deal which can be achieved by negotiation.

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UNISON ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This year's annual conference was held in Brighton and attended by over 2000 delegates. A variety of motions were debated from 'local government reorganisations' to the 'sale of blood and blood products', but two composite motions were supported by the conference delegation on the first day about the utilities.

Privatisation of electricity, gas, telecommunications and water has been characterised by:

- ♦ massive job losses
- ♦ reduced level and quality of service
- ♦ excessive profit margins
- ♦ exorbitant pay rises to directors

The annual conference has instructed the National Executive Committee to prepare a policy document for approval by 1996 conference, setting out the fiscal and legislative measures necessary to return all utilities to the public sector.

Attention was particularly drawn to the massive pay

rises and substantial perks that senior executives awarded themselves at the expense of employees and consumers and the so called regulators who have failed to limit these increases.

The conference believes that there should be statutory limitation on the profitability of these companies and on the dividend returns to shareholders in all the utilities. In-house retention of all employment relating to the core business and it's support services should also be regulated.

Helen King
(Branch Secretary)

On 30th March 1995 Manweb announced to its Trading staff that the company would exit retail, discontinuing the sale of appliances in high street stores and selling it's superstores to Scottish Power. Certain assurances were given:

- ♦ No compulsory redundancies
- ♦ Redeployment opportunities to be sought wherever possible
- ♦ A continued commitment to customer service in the high street

Almost 3 months on now and approximately 360 have opted for VSS, 87 of whom have gone to Scottish Power with 280 who have either been redeployed within Manweb or have chosen to remain in customer service

Exit Retail, Enter Customer Service

The difficulty which has confronted all retail staff over the last few months has been lack of information. Individuals have had to decide their future before the company has decided its policy with regard to the number of outlets to remain open and the extent of the work to be undertaken in the customer service centres.

It speaks volumes for the quality of the staff that those who have decided to leave have had no problems finding alternative employment. What a pity that Manweb is losing this wealth of talent. As for those who have chosen to stay they

are now working in very difficult circumstances. Shops look empty and in many cases are very run down. The public perception is that Manweb has closed it's shops and it is very difficult even for the committed people that are left to retain a positive, optimistic attitude when for the 2,000th time you are asked "When do you close?"

I am sure that the message from the staff to the company now would be, "Retail has gone, your decision, we can't change that. So now lets get on with the job, end the uncertainty, roll out the training, get the shops brought up to scratch and let us provide the customer service Manweb is committed to."

Linda Ingram (Vice Chair)

The dash for Nuclear cash

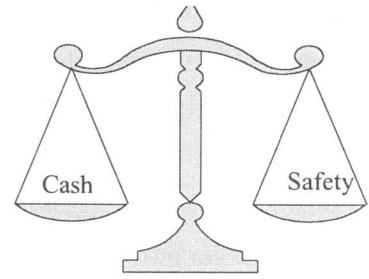
Are there any benefits from privatising the 'profitable' parts of Scottish Nuclear and Nuclear Electric and, if there are, who will benefit?

There is very little evidence that people 'at the sharp end' gain from belonging to a privatised electricity company. It always appears that any company wants 'more from less'. The only gain for staff who remain seems to be more pressure, uncertainty and stress.

In Nuclear Electric staff have been told we are the company's 'greatest asset'. Well, the company have gone for 'asset stripping' in a big way. Staff numbers have been reduced from 14,000 to 8,000 with the company driving towards

6,000. During the Coal Review, Magnox stations were 'a valuable asset' in Nuclear Electric's business. 'Regrettably' the Magnox stations are not to remain in the new company. No doubt there is a similar story to be told in Scottish Nuclear. 'Oh to be an asset now that privatisation is near'

The public should gain as the non-fossil fuel levy is to be abolished. This levy was set up to decommission the Magnox stations but their liabilities are now to be left for the tax payer. The sale of this company is supposed to raise around £3 billion. It cost about £2.5 billion to build Sizewell 'B' alone. Is this a case of buy one and get the rest free? And should the new company fail financially who will pick up the



YOU DECIDE !

bill for decommissioning? It can only be the tax-payer!

Nuclear Safety is the legal liability of the generators. The present regulatory system overseen by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is probably the best in the world. Will the present standards be affected by commercial pressure? What will the government do to ensure these high standards continue?

The benefits from privatising Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear are very few!

This 'dash for cash' by the government is unwanted and unnecessary. NOBODY needs this privatisation. Generation by using nuclear energy has a global dimension and as such should remain in the public domain. The industry should remain ACCOUNTABLE.

If you have concerns then why not contact your local MP. ESTUC (the Electricity Supply Trades Union Council) on 0171 582 6060 can supply you with information on the joint campaign to oppose this privatisation.

Sylvia Wheeler (Branch Secretary, Unison Nuclear Electric North)

Job Watch

Three years of VSS has left the workforce seriously depleted and in many areas, despite the talk of reducing the number of contractors, contracts are being extended and new contractors taken on.

In Information Services alone the number of permanent staff has been reduced by over 80 staff in 5 years, yet at the height of last year there were over 35 directly employed contractors on site plus around 20 more contractors working on site for company

FI who have an 18 month contract to support computer systems and numerous other contractors working either directly or indirectly on development of computer systems for Manweb.

Ironically the massive increase in the use of contract labour means a less efficient use of staff as more time is spent by permanent staff in training and supervising contractors than in developing and supporting systems, not to mention the cost of employing contractors, often at rates of £1000 per week.

Travel Time

The new company agreement includes a clause which entitles staff to claim compensation for excess travelling in their own time on company business. This is a reduced version of the allowance which was payable to industrial and engineering staff who often work at sites many miles from their normal base.

Despite all the boasts of the company that the new agreement harmonises arrangements for all staff, many clerical staff who have put in legitimate and authorised claims under this clause have had the compensation refused. Talks to resolve this 'misunderstanding' with the company have so far failed to produce a satisfactory solution. In the meantime representatives are advised to try and come to interim arrangements with their local managers for members in their constituencies.

Branch Officers for 1995

President.....**Jim Brown**
V.President.....**Mike Gregory**
Chair.....**Jim Brown**
V.Chair.....**Linda Ingram**
Secretary.....**Helen King**
Treasurer.....**Lynn Joyce**
Equal Opps.....**Julie Duffus**
Publicity.....**Dave Read**
Health&Safety...**Linda Ingram**
Membership.....**Paul Meacock**
Education.....**Anne Lysaght**
Welfare.....**Anne Hart**
Sports.....**Vacancy**

Free Wills

No, its not a film about a captive whale yearning for its freedom, its a new service offered to all members of Unison. The service is being run on Unison's behalf by Robin Thompson & Partners. Members who complete a simple form will have a will drafted FREE OF CHARGE within 8 weeks of the questionnaire being returned. Please ask your reps for details or write to: UNISON Free Wills Service, Compass House, Pynacles Close, Stanmore, Middx

Branch Office

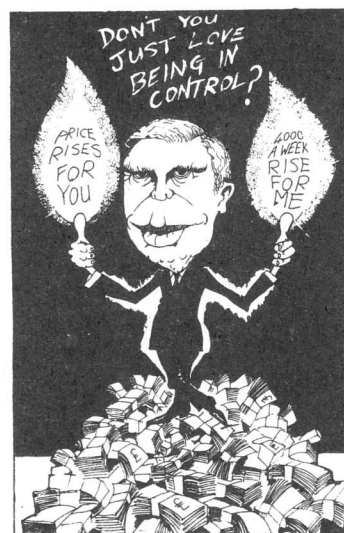
Despite all the problems faced by our union over the last 5 years, including the reduction in members due to VSS and subsequent loss of income, UNISON still offers the best value service to its members. Unlike many branches in electricity we run a small branch office which employs a part time clerical assistant and a full time branch organiser who is daily representing members who need the unions support. With the introduction of new technology in the branch office including a link to the company's Office system members can now contact Steve Williams by electronic mail as well as by phone or fax. With a full time official who is generally 'on the move' from one office to another this provides a direct link which all members can benefit from. (Steve's Office id is WILLS3).

Problems?

Financial difficulties? Family problems? Personal problems at work? Unison's welfare service is always willing to help, and in serious cases can provide financial assistance to members in distress. If you have a problem and would like help or advice you can contact Unison's Welfare Officer Ann Hart who will deal with the matter in complete confidence and provide as much assistance as possible to overcome the problem.

Gen. Secretary election

The post of Unison General Secretary is up for election this year. Nominations are due to close shortly and all candidates will be touring branches over the coming weeks to seek support in a secret ballot of all members. Keep a look out for literature and make sure you take part in the election for the leader of your union.



The views and opinions expressed in Livewire are not necessarily those of the UNISON Manweb