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Circular: 2020HOC0674AD

14 December 2020

TO: **ALL MEMBERS**

Dear Brother / Sister

RESOLUTION AGREED BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL - THE *BUYING-BACK* OF ANNUAL LEAVE IS NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE FBU MEMBERSHIP

The following resolution was agreed at a recent meeting of the Executive Council and was both moved and supported following reports by officials representing a number of Brigade Committees, where they had been approached by their fire and rescue services to reach agreement whereby the employer could *buy-back* employees' leave.

The resolution comprehensively explains the reason why such proposals are opposed by the Executive Council and at the same time recognises the financial pressures that may lead some members to be tempted by such approaches.

The Executive Council notes that some Fire and rescue services have approached brigade officials seeking agreement to introduce policies to *buy-back* leave from members.

The Executive Council has resolved that it opposes any attempts by fire and rescue services to introduce the *buy-back* of leave whether by negotiation or imposition. For clarity this includes all types of leave identified in Section 4 Part C of the Grey Book.

Paid holiday leave is not a gift from the employer, it is a legal entitlement to a break from work and current leave entitlements were achieved through hard struggles against begrudging employers. It helps to maintain the health and welfare of members by way of rest, recuperation and spending time with friends and family.

Annual leave provisions in the FRS are already poor when compared with some sectors. The leave entitlement has not been increased for a number of years and FRS leave provisions continue to be offset in great part against 'off duty' days.

It is important that we protect our current leave entitlement. The *buy-back* of leave undermines FBU policies which aspire to improve members' leave provisions. It is vital to protect our leave not only as one of our conditions of service but also to protect it in the interests of health and work-life balance.

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The Executive Council recognises the short-term attraction of buy-back to supplement household incomes which in many cases will have been reduced as a consequence of government austerity policies since 2010. We also recognise that in many cases household incomes will have been reduced as a consequence of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. We also recognise that members' household income has been reduced in real terms over many years by government public sector pay policy which has been administered by the employers' side of the NJC supported by chief fire and rescue service officers.

The introduction of *buy-back* of leave policies would undermine our continuous campaign to improve pay and leave.

We recognise that some fire and rescue services are making these approaches because of anticipated short-falls in a number of personnel available for work arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. For decades the FBU and its membership has made clear to FRAs, the public, the media and government alike that the underinvestment in the fire and rescue service which has resulted in massive cuts in the number of fire appliances, stations and the number of firefighters employed by fire and rescue services has a clear and recognisable damaging impacts on resilience at all times but particularly in instances of worst-case scenarios.

FBU members have, and continue to, put their shoulder to the wheel to assist the public and the health and care sectors during this health crisis. These approaches by some fire and rescue services to *buy-back* leave is a cynical attempt to cover up the failures of fire and rescue authorities to plan and provide sustainable fire cover for their communities. As a matter of course, firefighters sacrifice their own interests for the public. The requests for firefighters to make this sacrifice in the interests of the public as a consequence of deliberate understaffing of firefighters is a failing of decision makers and is a step too far.

It is noticeable, fire and service employers have not approached the union offering to improve the provisions in the Grey Book in return for FBU members' assistance.

Accordingly, for the reasons cited above, the Executive Council resolves that

- No Brigade committee may enter any agreement in relation to the *buy-back* of leave;
- If any such proposal is made by a fire and rescue service, brigade officials shall inform regional officials in order that this can be reported to head office and the Executive Council.
- All members should flatly refuse any approach made by their fire and rescue service on this matter.

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy does not apply to members' contractual entitlements for payment of untaken leave in respect of dismissal, ill-health retirement, retirement and resignation.

The Executive Council policy decision has immediate effect. The decision will be reported in the next report to Conference.

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Members are asked to support your Brigade Officials in implementing the substance of the policy created following this resolution being agreed by the Executive Council.

Best wishes.

Yours in solidarity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Dark', with a stylized, cursive script.

ANDY DARK
Assistant General Secretary

AD/jh