

7<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Dear Members of the House of Commons Commission,

### **T&G Unite Submission to the Review on Centralisation of Staff**

1. The group that has most to personally lose or gain as a result of the centralisation of staff, is the staff themselves. There are approximately 2000<sup>1</sup>, 400 of whom are represented by the T&G Unite Parliamentary Staff Branch, the largest staff group. This submission has been compiled following a consultation of branch members and was endorsed at the branch's most recent meeting.
2. The branch submits that MPs' staff are already centrally employed by the House of Commons. We are able to provide a Barrister's opinion that verifies this. We are public servants paid from the Members' Estimate and managed by MPs.
3. In the proposed change to our employment there are a number of concerns which we set out below, and a number of recommendations.
4. Our position can be summarised as a request for:
  - 1) **Pay** bargaining - immediate trade union recognition as part of the Whitley System<sup>2</sup>, and a new system under which union recognition is protected. (see EDMs 1057 and 1677)
  - 2) **Protection** of jobs, terms and conditions of current staff
  - 3) **Parity** with House of Commons staff pensions, redundancy arrangements etc. (including grievance and disciplinary procedures, occupational health, health & safety arrangements).
5. There was much to be encouraged by in the debate on the motion on the 30<sup>th</sup> April. We were encouraged that at the despatch box the Deputy Leader of the House said "the terms and conditions that our staff enjoy should at least be protected by any changes that may be made in the future"<sup>3</sup>.
6. We were encouraged to hear from David Heath MP that he understood that MPs are not always given the help they need by the House Authorities to be good managers: "some Members do not behave as we would wish in their

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Stuart Bell: Hansard, Column 1077 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009

<sup>2</sup> The Whitley System consists of representatives from Management and representatives from the different Trade Unions that represent staff of the House of Commons Service. Regular joint meetings occur throughout the year, both formally - the Whitley, the General Purposes Sub-Committee and the Joint Consultative Committees - and informally. Informal meetings are far more frequent, when either side can air their concerns. The formal meetings all have minutes, which are circulated to members of staff.

<sup>3</sup> **30 Apr 2009 : Column 1125**

employment of their staff. There are some mill owner MPs who exploit their staff, who might be extremely grateful for the protection of the House”<sup>4</sup>.

7. We were encouraged by the argument of Tim Boswell MP that “We need lots of trade union and employment law input.”<sup>5</sup>

8. We were also encouraged by the assurances of Sir Stuart Bell MP that these matters would be considered: political restrictions, pensions, redundancy, bonuses, what will happen at a general election if a member loses. And that his view is: “the consideration of the anxieties of staff is extremely important.”

***With this in mind the branch requires these assurances:***

**Division of responsibility between the House as employer and Members**

9. That staff of MPs can continue to be politically unrestricted and are allowed to hold elected office elsewhere.

10. That bonuses and overtime payments continue to be allocated by the MP.

**Transitional arrangements.**

11. That there will be full continuation of accrued benefits e.g redundancy, holiday entitlement.

12. That no staff member should lose their job because they are above the retirement age.

**Difficult cases**

13. That staff who currently have their wages part/fully paid by an APPG, union, party, or the MP, or who are contractors, or funded collectively, should be protected.

14. That expense-reimbursed interns/volunteers should be protected under a formalised internship scheme.

***The branch makes these recommendations:***

**15. Recommendation 1: PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE –  
Recognition of the Unite Union**

**That to show best practice as an employer the House of Commons should immediately recognise the Unite union, in order that the union can be a full partner throughout the transition and become a member of the Whitley System.**

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<sup>4</sup> 30 Apr 2009 : Column 1086

<sup>5</sup> 30 Apr 2009 : Column 1095

**16. Recommendation 2: PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

That in the process of centralisation, MPs staff are moved to the House of Commons pension scheme, as suggested by Hugh Bayley MP<sup>6</sup>.

**18. Recommendation 3: PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

That in the process of centralisation, MPs staff are moved to the House of Commons redundancy scheme, as suggested by Mohammad Sarwar MP<sup>7</sup>.

**19. Recommendation 4: PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE.**

The annual cost of living allowance be automatically implemented, one of the suggestions noted in the Review of Parliamentary Pay 2007<sup>8</sup>

**20. Recommendation 5: EMPLOYING BODY.**

That the Commission's Option 3, a new statutory body be created to employ MPs staff to overcome the problems connected with political impartiality and open recruitment. The staff union, as well as MPs should be represented on the body. A new neutral HR department should replace the Department of Resources Personnel Advice service which currently acts on behalf of MPs rather than staff.

**Request for additional information:**

21. The union asks the Commission to provide information on what centralisation will mean for constituency-based staff, particularly in terms of health and safety or entitlements that currently the House can only apply at Westminster.

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<sup>6</sup> Hugh Bayley: "Does the hon. Gentleman really believe that it is fair, just and sustainable that the staff of the House, who provide a very good service to us, are in a public sector final salary pension scheme with a notional contribution by the employer of about 25 per cent. of earnings, whereas our staff are entitled to join only a stakeholder scheme, which provides considerably poorer benefits and whereby they get only 10 per cent. of their salary paid in by the employer?"

<sup>7</sup> EDM 599 (64 Signatures)

**REDUNDANCY ARRANGEMENTS FOR HON. MEMBERS' STAFF** 27.01.2009  
Sarwar, Mohammad

That this House notes the derisory redundancy arrangements available to staff of hon. Members as compared to other staff on the parliamentary estate; calls on the House authorities to review the arrangements before the next general election; and urges all hon. Members to support the UNITE Parliamentary Staff Branch campaign to improve staff contracts above the statutory minimum redundancy payment.

<sup>8</sup> Suggestions made to rectify the situation included the automatic uprating of salaries, and that the House authorities should write to each MP to say that the uprating would take place unless the MP objected. P.47