

23 February 2015

The Editor
The Scotsman

Dear Sir

As the Chair of the Prison Officers Association in Scotland I feel compelled to respond to your sister papers article (Scotland on Sunday 22nd Feb) "SNP signs no-strike deal with prison staff" given how wide of the mark the piece is. The first thing to say is that there is no, *no strike* agreement in place, either with the Scottish Government or in fact the Scottish Prison Service. What is in place is a recognition that there is no longer a need for the POA to continue with a ballot for industrial action, due to the issue that led to the ballot in the first place having been resolved by the introduction of an interim solution. The interim payment was balloted on and some 83.4% of the members voted to accept the offer, with a ballot return of 84%.

What was made crystal clear to the members in the ballot was that acceptance of the deal would mean our dispute would be resolved, and we would not be balloting for strike action on this issue through the existing pay deal period. It was also made clear that should they reject the offer, we would continue with our ballot for industrial action.

That is not a no strike deal, it is simply a reflection of the issue under dispute having now been resolved, and therefore no legitimate reason for a union to continue on the path it had set out on. At no time were we as a union asked by either the Chief Executive of the SPS, or by Scottish Government to sign up to a no strike deal as a condition of the offer made.

As a union we are both dismayed and disappointed to see some of the comments attributed to people in your article who have felt well enough informed to both comment and criticise, having not personally come near us at any time to check their understanding of this deal. We will be formally contacting some of them for an explanation of the quotes attributed to them, in particular the STUC given that we are an affiliated member and should be able to expect better from them.

Particularly galling is the concern expressed by the Labour party over the loss of prison officers "fundamental right to withdraw their labour". Our colleagues in England and Wales have no such right, due to a Labour government using previous Tory anti trade union legislation against them to remove it. The great irony in all of this is that the only prison officers in the UK with the right to strike are here in Scotland, due to the present Scottish government declining the invite from Jack Straw, Labour Home Secretary at the time, to use the same legislation against Scottish prison officers.

I am at a loss in understanding why a trade unions dispute being resolved without strike action is a problem for some. Importantly from our point of view, it is not a problem for our members going by the overwhelming support for this deal through the ballot box.

As trade unionists and democrats, that should be a good news story for us all.

Yours sincerely

PHIL FAIRLIE
Chair POA Scotland