

The President's Column

Most of you will be aware that there is an "unplanned" election happening in the parent union. This has been brought about by a member questioning the legality, under the union's rules, of the Amicus section's current General Secretary staying on after his normal retirement date (65th birthday). The 'questioning' was actually a formal legal challenge made to the Certification Officer for Trades Unions and the Certification Officer would not commit himself on the subject at this time. So the Executive decided it had to have a specific vote on the issue. This will elect a General Secretary just for the Amicus section and only for one year, from the end of 2009 to the end of 2010.

As a result several other people have declared an interest in standing; and so far the reasons given are mainly associated with the slow progress of the merger and the 'politicking' which has been going on. The only reason I can see for people to put effort into getting elected for one year is that it will help them if they want to stand for the Unite General Secretary job which is a much bigger prize. So does this mean they are all 'politicking'? Well probably, but that is inevitable in any large organisation; it will be only too familiar to all those of us who have worked in a large company.

So how might this affect UKAPE; and what, if anything, should we do about it? We are a small percentage of the total Amicus membership and we could just keep our heads down and hope it will pass well above us. However I believe that it is important to engage with the democratic process, when people don't do this it is often the first step to losing that democracy. UKAPE and all the other Associations in the Federation of Professional Associations (FPA) are concerned about losing our ability to influence the direction of the parent union and are trying to use this election as an opportunity to lobby those at the top.

We are trying to make contact with as many candidates as possible to assess their views on the position of Professional and Managerial members within the parent union; and have already had a meeting with the current General Secretary as reported elsewhere in this issue. Further reports will follow as information becomes available.

All this is the 'view from the top'; while most of us are mainly concerned with how things will turn out for us at the working level. One of our activists, Roger Sabido, was elected to the Amicus Regional Council in the South West a couple of years ago, and he has attended several joint meetings of the Amicus Regional Council with the T&G equivalent, the Regional Committee. While there are obviously some differences in the industries and practices between the two sections; the overwhelming impression Roger has received is that the T&G activists just want to get on with the job of representing their members. Like us they are not really concerned with the politicking; they see their job as supporting the membership. We just need to get some more people higher up the organisation to see things the same way.

By the time the ballot is underway we will be into yet another New Year so my best wishes to you all for Christmas and 2009.

Peter Everitt, President

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Editorial

This editorial starts with an apology. The last edition was very late in arriving with our readers and this was, we understand, caused by problems with a folding machine at Hayes Court over which we had absolutely no control. Let's hope that this edition fares rather better.

Next year there will be an election for the AMICUS Section General Secretary; we have dealt with the reasons for this in this newsletter and would encourage all our members to use their vote when the time comes.

We have another version of what constitutes a fully rounded qualified engineer, which must conclude this debate for the time being; however, prompted by a letter in the recent Professional Engineer concerning the advertisement for a new Chief Executive of the IMechE, we pose the question, "What does a learned Society require from its CEO?" Bob Douglas reports on the current round of discussions with Derek Simpson concerning the future of the Federation of Professional Associations, FPA.

And so again we remind you that all comments on these and any other topics are always very welcome, and if you wish to contribute please bear in mind that the end of February is the closing date for the next edition.

It only remains therefore to wish all our readers a very Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Bob Simpson,
Editor



A Message from Somewhere in the Middle*.

Elsewhere you can read – or may have already read – a short summary of my CV. This note is not to laud my contributions but to emphasise to readers how long in the tooth a number of EC members are. I am far from being the oldest, nor am I the longest serving member. I have put in a lot of time and I have enjoyed it all – and made a lot of fantastic friendships – but I really think it is time we looked forward to handing it over.

I have long been out of the employment scene and that is not good for a union official. I am making this plea on behalf of many in the Executive Committee. Naming no names but there must be quite a few like me who could do with a break. They will not say so but together we have kept the Association going for a long time and we need some new blood. Much better that there should be a gradual hand-over than that the whole thing should crumble into dust at one time. In the management books it is called "succession planning".

Far from wearing us down, membership of what an earlier National Secretary, Bob Shannon, called the UKAPE gentlemen's dining club, has produced a group of long lived and fit colleagues who look like going on for ever: but I can recall off the top of my head four past presidents (plus Charles Hickling of beloved memory) whose company we no longer enjoy.

Most of the present Executive have seen their youngsters through school, into university and back again and are now grandfathers, so it won't hurt you. There is an undercurrent of change in the Association; the Centre set up is not working – and has not for a long time. I am not the one who runs away in the face of change. I welcome it but we need a new team to do it justice. How about it, you guys? ("Guys" in the New Zealand sense: men and women!)

*I do not regard myself as 'at the top'. At best I am somewhere in the middle.

Dick Hegerty
Assistant National Secretary

FPA National Committee and Derek Simpson – 28 Nov 2008

The FPA National Committee met with Derek Simpson, the General Secretary of the Amicus Section of Unite the Union, so that he could inform the committee of his views on the FPA and its future.

Simpson began with an overview of the union and where it was going. The merger with the T & G is progressing slowly but he contended that he is not causing the delay. He indicated that the stories in the press about how he and Tony Woodley are at loggerheads are not true.

There are still some crunch points and Cabin Crew 89 is one of them. CC89 was originally formed as a breakaway union from the T & G because of general dissatisfaction with the T & G but now they have to work together. There appears to be some personal animosity between the two groups and the T & G staff seem to receive considerable support from their section of the union. Simpson agreed that the T & G should not run roughshod over our members.

It was also pointed out that the T & G staff section, ACTS, is still active despite assertions that it had disbanded and it has a seat on the National Executive Council, which the FPA does not. ACTS is smaller than the FPA and the committee members found it strange that it was in such a position when the FPA had been rent asunder.

The FPA National Committee is still in existence but has no influence as it has no path to Regional or National Sector Conferences or the Main Biennial Union Conference. Derek Simpson did appreciate this problem and after some discussion, Kevin O'Gallagher, the UKAPE National Officer,

proposed that a discussion paper be drawn up recommending that the FPA be reconstituted as a Sector. Simpson indicated that this is something that the NEC can undertake, but not something he could do on his own, but he could encourage the progress. It was agreed that a small group is to draw up the paper in the near future.

Simpson then spoke briefly about the imminent election for the Unite-Amicus Section General Secretary. He considered the person who made the legal challenge causing the election was motivated by malice, and that the people proposing to stand against him were in the main campaigning on very narrow and possibly spurious arguments on how the union was run and progress on the merger.

Finally he spoke about the activists in the union, like the members of the committee. He said that most activists are not motivated by self-interest but the wish to make a difference. He indicated that the union must be fit for its purpose and allow for the diversity of its members. If the problem with FPA members is not solved they will ultimately find another home.

Derek Simpson spoke well and what he said was what the committee wanted to hear. To quote him, "I say what I mean, not for electoral convenience".

R Douglas, Vice President



An Engineer and a Chief Executive

In our ongoing debate about what is or is not an engineer, retired member WA Corkill offers the following points for consideration:

When Nevil Shute (Aeronautical Engineer, Company Chairman and Novelist) wrote "Most Secret" he had a character who said, "He knew the man was an Engineer because he asked the right questions. And he asked all of them." But that was in the 1940s when an Engineer had to have practical workshop or site training plus five years in a responsible position. Since about 1970 the practical training requirement has been eroded so that now I question whether the title Chartered Engineer has any meaning at all – apart from a very highly specialised sort of engineer engaged in a very narrow field.

In the 1940s I was in charge of radar equipment on a warship at sea. The very best brains had designed the latest radar sets, but they stopped working every time the guns were fired! This simply goes to show that any design is only as good as a practical engineer's ability to keep it working under difficult conditions.

No matter how clever graduates may be they are probably useless without the five years practical training and experience. They cannot ask all the right questions because they have no idea what questions to ask.

Under recent proposals, George Stephenson and I would both be described as tradespersons, in other words the butler would direct us to the servants' quarters. But I believe Mr Stephenson was quite a good engineer in his time, and I led a section of very experienced former apprentices, one of whom was a Chartered Engineer and two were former drawing office section leaders. I had another ten persons acting on my orders in the drawing office, and I conducted meetings in German, French and other languages without an interpreter.

Owing to my seagoing experiences and later training, I could find the causes of breakdowns and disasters with rotating machinery in a few minutes – I had seen them all before and I knew where to look. So was I an engineer, or merely a tradesperson? Do we want or need any more people of my ilk, or those I led?

Personally, I regard the current lack of practical training so serious that a complete rethink is needed.

To sum up, there are so many kinds of engineer that it makes no sense at all to restrict titles and positions to those from a very narrow specialised field which may be dominated by academics because they alone can get time off to attend meetings.

W A Corkill

It seems that Mr Corkill is quite clear on what constitutes an engineer, including his or her training, and this leads on to the subject of what constitutes a chief executive.

For those who have not been following the saga of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers' Chief Executive, this is a very potted history. In September 2006, following the

retirement of the previous Chief Executive Sir Michael Moore, amid much self-congratulatory trumpeting, the IMechE appointed its first female Chief Executive, Ruth Spellman. Mrs Spellman appeared to be doing all the right things but left the post earlier this year for a similar position with the Chartered Institute of Management. It is understood that the vacancy has now been advertised, although the job description etc has proved impossible to locate.

Nevertheless a letter in the recent Professional Engineer from William Brunger (a correspondent not unknown in these columns) indicated that the new Chief Executive not only will receive a six-figure salary plus an undisclosed bonus but is also not required to be a Chartered Engineer. So some of the questions that seem to present themselves are: What are the qualifications required for this position? Is a six-figure salary appropriate? How is the bonus to be measured given that this august body actually produces nothing at all? Is it really the case that an Engineer would not be better placed to undertake these duties (whatever they are)?

In addition, Mr Brunger indicates that the new Chief Executive's top priority should be the attainment of status equivalent to other professions.

Do we agree with this final assessment? Is a six-figure salary (plus bonus) appropriate and would a Chartered Engineer be a more suitable appointee? As ever your views would be more than welcome.

Amicus General Secretary Election

As our president has said, we are currently at the beginning of an election campaign for the AMICUS Section General Secretary of our union. The details of the election procedure are adequately covered on the AMICUS website. Under the procedure adopted for the merger between AMICUS and the TGWU, the new union is operating as two separate sections led by two joint General Secretaries, Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley. The AMICUS Section election has been brought about by a challenge raised by a sacked Rolls Royce convener Jerry Hicks with the Trade Union Certification Officer over the rules drawn up when UNITE was formed, which should not have allowed the current AMICUS General Secretary Derek Simpson to remain beyond his 65th birthday. At the time of going to press there are five individuals seeking nomination for election. UKAPE is entitled to make a nomination but at this stage the Executive Committee has not made a recommendation, or organised a suitable meeting of the members to consider this. Whoever is elected to this exalted position will only remain in office for a period of twelve months because at that point the final merger of the two unions will have taken place and there will then be an election for a new General Secretary of the new combined union, and neither Derek Simpson nor Tony Woodley will be eligible for this post.

When all nominations have been received and approved, the election will take place between 15 February and 6 March next year. It is not UKAPE's practice to endorse any particular candidate but we do encourage our members to use their vote and to use it wisely.

Important Message from the Treasurer to all Paying Members

We have held our subscription rate for the past four years but inflation has overtaken us and there is a need for an increase to avoid a deficit. Fortunately there is no imminent rise in the Unite-Amicus contribution and your Executive Committee has approved a rise of only £1.00 a month to give rates of £12.00 a month, £36.00 a quarter and £144.00 a year.

These rises will be effective from the 1 January 2009 and will be automatic for Direct Debit and Check Off payers. Members paying by Standing Order are asked to change the instructions to their Bank to avoid arrears.

*Brian West,
Hon. Treasurer*

Biennial Delegate Conference



[Ed: The picture above shows the EC at its meeting on 8 November; the genial soul looking down on the group is of course Treasurer Brian West who was otherwise engaged when the picture was taken.]

We reported in the June edition that possibly the most far-reaching motion carried by Conference was Motion 3, proposing that BDC be replaced by an AGM. At its meeting following BDC, the Executive Committee charged the Sub-Committee proposed by BDC to draft the rule changes required to facilitate this proposed change. The Sub-Committee presented its proposals to the EC at its meeting on 8 November, which were considered in detail. A number of changes to the proposals were suggested by the EC, which will be considered by the Sub-Committee in order to put a final proposal to the Special BDC which will need to be convened to deal with this. At this stage the EC has not indicated whether or not it will support the Sub-Committee's proposals, no doubt this will be decided at the EC meeting scheduled for March next year.

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If you have a home email address where we can contact you, please email the details to either Dick Hegerty or Peter Everitt. Updated information is also posted on the UKAPE website at: www.ukape.org.uk

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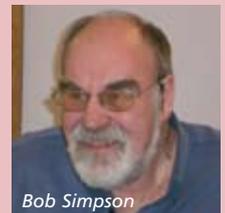
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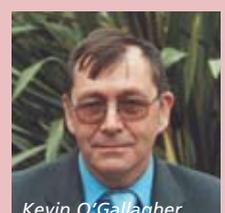
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