

# #EquitySaveOurStaff Campaign (ESOS) A SUMMARY DOCUMENT

October 2020 – April 2021

*created by Julie Coombe, Kirsten McLean & Andy Clark.*

Paul W Fleming (PWF/GS) was elected Equity's General Secretary in July 2020 & took office in October 2020. His salary is in excess of £90k.

He is also a sitting Labour Councillor in Southwark. His allowance for that post is £11,496.36 per annum as per 2019/2020 Council accounts.

Despite his Manifesto promise to be a 'Full-Time General Secretary' he has yet to resign his Councillor position (as at 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021).

## **COMPULSORY REDUNDANCY**

In December 2020, Council - the governing body of Equity - noted (approved) PWF's plans for restructuring - involving redundancies, relocation, and deletion of posts. They had to be taken as a whole or not at all. The only opposition came from the Scottish, Welsh & Northern Irish councillors whose Nations had the most to lose (votes were 21 for, 3 against). The reason given for the restructuring was 'financial'. The GS claims the union was in grave financial peril & redundancies - some compulsory - were the solution. The 3 National Councillors gave very strong arguments that this was not the case but they were ignored.

In Equity, Scotland & NI is run from the Glasgow office; 2 Organisers and 1 Organiser/Recruitment & Retention post. PWF's plan was for the compulsory redundancy of 1 Organiser & to centralise the organising of NI and run it himself from London. He claimed the Glasgow Office was over staffed and there was not enough work to justify 2 Organisers. He used his own metrics to come to this conclusion - metrics which he refused to publish and later admitted (in an unofficial council meeting) were wrong. These plans were to be forced through with brutal speed by Dec 18th while government furlough was still available.

The Scottish National Committee (SNC) strongly opposed these plans on the grounds that the figures didn't add up. They met with the GS and offered solutions and asked him at least to wait & make use of furlough. He said no.

### **Points to note:**

- The GS is refusing to publish legal advice which he claims justify his actions.
- During those negotiations Equity advertised 2 Organiser posts & 2 Communications posts (all in London).
- It is unclear what specific redeployment - if any - was offered.
- At an un-minuted Council briefing on 14th Jan, in a last-minute change Paul Fleming announced the creation of a new part-time Organiser post for NI starting Jan 2022 and that Glasgow was to continue overseeing NI until then. This new plan negates the savings and the justification for the redundancy.
- The GS is refusing to answer whether Non-Disclosure or confidential Settlement Agreements have been used in relation to any of the redundancies.
- Despite claiming the union to be in a worse financial position than first thought, the initial savings projection has been reduced from £1.26M to £1.1M (excluding redundancies costs originally estimated at no more than £165k).

# #EquitySaveOurStaff Campaign (ESOS) A SUMMARY DOCUMENT

October 2020 – April 2021

*created by Julie Coombe, Kirsten McLean & Andy Clark.*

This is due to the cost of the new post in NI. It is also reasonable to surmise that redundancy costs are significantly higher than first estimated.

## **CAMPAIGN: #EquitySaveOurStaff**

When the Scottish National Council could not convince PWF, we went to the members. Equity is a member-led union and these proposals had taken place without any consultation with the membership. We launched a petition on change.org (3000 signatures) and took to Social Media. There the campaign led to vigorous debate with some regrettable language used by both sides. #ESOS condemned the unacceptable language & individual activists publicly apologised. To date there have been no apologies from Equity for their behaviour.

### **Points to note:**

- Following speculation that Lorne Boswell had been selected for redundancy, PWF tweeted that the process was ongoing & no decision had been made. However, hours later Equity President Maureen Beattie confirmed on Twitter that it was indeed Lorne who had been chosen.
- PWF changed his twitter settings to block activists replying to him & shut down debate.
- In deciding which organiser was to be made redundant, the selection panel consisted of only one person; Senior Deputy to the General Secretary, Stephen Spence. This shows a clear conflict of interest as the staff member who retained his job was interviewed for post by Spence, only three years ago. Lorne Boswell was selected for redundancy despite having 29 years more experience in post than this colleague.

## **OPEN MEETING: SCOTTISH MEMBERSHIP 6<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021**

PWF had an open meeting with the Scottish membership on Jan 6<sup>th</sup> 2021. He tried to dazzle with political spin & semantics. He failed. He made the members angrier with his dogged avoidance of any human dimension. He referred to NI as “a burden” on the Glasgow office and constantly stumbled and repeated himself. He did not win hearts & minds.

The redundancy was announced on Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 2021. Despite taking seven weeks to conclude and involving representation from a full-time Unite union official throughout, it was described as a ‘voluntary redundancy.’ (*edit: it also included an appeal process*).

## **EQUITY CONDUCT**

As host of the petition, Kirstin McLean was presumed, by PWF, as the head of the campaign. This resulted in her being singled out for appalling treatment by the GS & the Union. It led her to apply for a Subject Access Request (SAR) & the results were shocking.

### **Points to note:**

- The language used in these (SAR) emails about Kirstin by Equity senior staff and or councillors is sexist, misogynist, patronising and bullying.

# #EquitySaveOurStaff Campaign (ESOS) A SUMMARY DOCUMENT

October 2020 – April 2021

*created by Julie Coombe, Kirsten McLean & Andy Clark.*

---

- Her mental health is called into question
- Assertions are made about her morals, her ethics, her status and she is called “paranoid”
- There is an email advising the GS how to deal with Kirstin at the open meeting. It reads like 1940’s style patriarchal propaganda.
- Emails where members are described unflatteringly by staff as ‘Bloody actors’ and the Scots as ‘this lot’
- There are NO emails where the GS admonishes staff/officers for speaking this way about a member & the membership.
- Equity’s Statement
- On the 10th Feb, the GS published a statement on the Equity website saying the #ESOS campaign was abusive. He stated that hate mail had been sent to a staff member’s home. He cited examples of the terrible language used against him.

## **Points to note:**

- The #ESOS knew nothing about hate mail
- the examples of hate speak cited were cherry picked from a satirical pastiche of a poem in auld Scots sent to the GS from a lone activist & not an official missive from the campaign. It was opportunistically misquoted.
- The #ESOS publicly condemned the alleged letter & abusive language
- Equity refuse to show us the letter
- Equity refuse to acknowledge they have misled opinion of the campaign by misquoting the poem
- Equity has besmirched a whole Nation by suggesting only one of us could’ve sent the letter
- Maureen Beattie confirmed that the GS posted this statement without knowledge of the President, VPs or Council thus completely failing in due process.
- The Scottish membership are demanding an apology from Equity & that the statement be taken down from the website. They need to make this right.

## **THE STAGE**

Equity’s statement was published as an article in The Stage on the 11th Feb.

## **Points to note:**

- The Stage did not see the poison pen letter. They just took Equity’s word for it
- The Stage did not come to the #ESOS campaign for comment
- Equity did not go to the police about the letter. They went to The Stage
- Equity & The Stage are complicit in wrongly characterising a Nation of members with this article

## **SCOTTISH NATIONAL COMMITTEE**

The SNC made an official response to the conclusion of Lorne Boswell’s redundancy. It was treated with contempt by the GS. He delivered a statement effectively muzzling

# #EquitySaveOurStaff Campaign (ESOS)

## A SUMMARY DOCUMENT

October 2020 – April 2021

*created by Julie Coombe, Kirsten McLean & Andy Clark.*

---

the committee and has refused to answer any further questions. It appears it must be Paul Fleming's way or no way. 9 elected members of the committee have now resigned (as at 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021).

### **Points to note:**

- The GS responded to the resignations with another rebuke.
- He chose to attack a member of the committee for an ill-judged remark in his resignation letter - this was a direct quote from one of Kirstin's SAR emails.
- The GS chose to twist this remark in order to label a wonderful comrade sexist, misogynistic & racist. Nothing could be further from the truth.
- Our comrade apologised for his remark but resigned fully from Equity membership
- He asked that Paul Fleming apologise for the slurs on his character. Paul Fleming has not apologised. The membership has asked the GS to apologise to our comrade. They will not stop asking until he does.
- This is not going away. Paul W Fleming's legacy may be that he was the Equity General Secretary who lost Scotland.