



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Katy Clark MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland Region

15<sup>th</sup> August 2023

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2HB

Our reference: BDESD-JR

### **Dispute at DES Plant in Beith, North Ayrshire**

Dear Ben,

I am writing regarding an urgent development in the West Scotland region I represent in the Scottish Parliament.

From Monday 21 August, staff working at the Defence Supply and Equipment (DES) plant in Beith in North Ayrshire will be taking continuous strike action for two weeks. This comes after multiple days of strike action in July and early August, which were the first in the history of DES. The dispute relates to the unequal application of bonus payments, with non-craft workers at the base who prepare arms and munitions for transport being refused the same retention bonuses as managers and craft workers who assemble munitions.

Having spoken to workers directly on the picket line, it is clear the decision to strike has not been taken lightly. They feel they have not been treated with respect, dignity or equality by management. They fully understand the need to invest in skilled colleagues, but these colleagues cannot perform their tasks without the assistance of non-craft support. GMB Scotland, the union representing the workers, now estimate the pay gap between craft workers, who assemble the munitions, and non-craft colleagues, who support their work and prepare equipment for transport, has tripled to £18,000. This is unacceptable.

A two-tier workforce at a Ministry of Defence (MoD) facility is not in anyone's interests, including those of the UK's armed forces. Given the immense importance of the work they are doing, seeking to ensure equipment reaches allies under siege in Ukraine, it is concerning that management has fomented such unnecessary ill will and division among the workforce by creating huge pay disparities. This has also greatly undermined staff relationships and morale. I note that a MoD spokesperson is quoted as saying: "We remain open to dialogue with GMB to discuss the issues raised and work towards resolving them." However, my direct discussions with GMB Scotland suggest this is not the case, and that the union has had real difficulty in getting a response from MoD in their pursuit of talks. I also understand that their letters addressed to you have gone unanswered.



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It is extremely disappointing that the MoD continues to be so obstructive. For the sake of these workers, the plant, the country and its allies, it is urgently important that management gets around the table and seeks to urgently resolve this dispute.

I hope you will respond to this letter and provide an update on what steps are being taken.

Yours sincerely,

**Katy Clark MSP**  
**West Scotland Region**