The Daily Mail news story 'Mayday!' which criticises the RNLI was published 12 May 2018, and is copied below:

The RNLI's reply of 22 May 2018, published in 'Civil Society', can be found online here: https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/rnli-email-supporters-with-own-side-of-story-following-daily-mail-article.html

There appear to be valid points on both sides of the argument. However, there is likely to be a fundamental problem in an organisation where the rescue work is done by about 8,000 volunteer lifeboat crewmen and shore crew, with 2,360 administrative, IT and maintenance staff paid between £20,000 and £56,000, plus 54 senior management paid between £60,000 and £170,000.

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MAYDAY!

How Britain’s heroic lifeboat men are drowning in a sea of demeaning political correctness imposed by countless highly-paid pen pushers.

Daily Mail, 12 May 2018, by Guy Adams and Richard Marsden

Controversial: The RNLI’s departing fundraising director Leesa Harwood

WHEN Andy Hibbs isn’t hauling lobster pots aboard his fishing boat Matauri Bay, he devotes himself to helping those who, as the hymn goes, find themselves in peril on the sea. The son of a lifeboatman, he joined the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) at the age of 21 and has spent his adult life serving at its station in his hometown St Helier, the capital of Jersey.
For doing this skilled, time-consuming, and often dangerous job, the 45-year-old father of one hasn’t earned a penny (like almost all RNLI crew members, he’s an unpaid volunteer). But it offers other rewards.

His crew have saved countless lives, becoming pillars of their seafaring community.

One morning in 1995, to cite perhaps their greatest triumph, Hibbs was part of a team which helped a catamaran carrying 300 passengers that had hit rocks off the coast of Jersey, and was sinking.

With disregard for their safety, they got alongside the vessel, which was listing dangerously, and plucked off men, women and children.

‘It was a real eye-opener,’ he recalls. ‘It brought home how serious the job was, and the responsibility in our hands.’

More recently, Hibbs was coxswain (the effective captain of a lifeboat) when his 25-strong crew featured in an ITV News item about the ‘brilliant’ and ‘capable’ RNLI teams in the Channel Islands.

Yet this summer, one aspect of their job will be different.

When they motor out of St Helier harbour to save lives, they won’t fly the RNLI flag. They are no longer associated with the famous charity.

It follows an extraordinarily bitter row, initially centring on an alleged breach of a health and safety procedure, which has placed the island’s lifeboatmen in conflict with the wealthy maritime charity’s headquarters in Poole.

The dispute — which led to allegations of bullying, intimidation and mendacity on both sides — rumbled on for more than a year. It has seen public demonstrations and rumours of corruption and cover-ups.

Matters culminated before Christmas with the entire St Helier lifeboat crew resigning.

Hibbs and his team have relaunched as an independent operation, the Jersey Lifeboat Association, and will soon take delivery of their first vessel.

‘I’m sad that it has come to this, but the RNLI caused this mess,’ Hibbs says. ‘They have been unpleasant and confrontational, and treated us volunteers with contempt.’

We’ll explore this ugly business (in which no side seems blameless) later.

But first, an important point: the lifeboatmen of Jersey are not alone.

Two other crews are embroiled in public disputes with RNLI leadership.

One, in Whitby, North Yorkshire, revolves around jokey Christmas gifts exchanged by lifeboatmen, including a mug with a picture of a naked woman on it and one of the crew’s faces superimposed on to the model’s head.
A female superior found the mugs in a cupboard and the pair were sacked.

The offending items were either saucy or obscene, depending on your point of view. The RNLI insists they were ‘pornographic’.

Either way, an investigation talked of ‘safeguarding’ issues and found the images on the mugs ‘could have been seen by visiting schoolchildren’.

It also uncovered ‘conduct issues’ related to the crew’s social media use, which compromised the station’s status as a ‘safe and inclusive environment’.

In protest at the men’s sacking, four crew members resigned. Some 11,000 people have signed a petition demanding their reinstatement. Down the coast in Scarborough, the Mail this week revealed that RNLI coxswain Tom Clark has been sacked, after 34 years of service, for allegedly breaking health and safety guidelines by going on a sea exercise with unauthorised passengers on his lifeboat.

He accused the RNLI of ‘bullying and intimidation’, saying that volunteer lifeboatmen were being ‘bombarded’ with ‘new rules, forms, acronyms and health and safety’.

A petition to reinstate him has 5,000 signatures.

Drowning sailors are, of course, unlikely to care whether their rescuer owns an inappropriate item of crockery, or once set sail with unauthorised passengers.

Yet the RNLI insists its actions are warranted, arguing that it’s duty-bound to protect staff from bullying and harassment, and must enforce its safety protocols.

This clash, between what one might call traditional lifeboat culture and the forces of political correctness, turns out to be the source of heated conflict in RNLI stations nationwide.

Before Christmas, Coxswain Tommy Yule, of the Scottish fishing port of Arbroath, was sacked after an incident at a party where visiting Dutch lifeboatmen were entertained.

Reports of what happened vary. But it appears to have involved a prank known as a ‘three-man lift’, in which a crew member exposed his backside. Yule was seemingly fired after failing to intervene.

Fellow crewman Jamie Robertson also went.

A third man, Alan Russell, who served the RNLI for two decades, quit in protest, saying it was just ‘a practical joke’.

As a result of their departure, Arbroath went without a lifeboat for months. Meanwhile, in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire, two senior helmsmen lost their jobs after allegedly taking incorrectly trained staff on a rescue.
In Moelfre, on Anglesey, a cancer-stricken Coxswain was sacked (and an ally resigned) in 2016 after a mysterious ‘personnel issue’. In New Brighton, Merseyside, 12 crew members were sacked that same year after falling out with RNLI management over the sacking of a former colleague.

Thanks to the latter rebellion, the station had a restricted service, or was ‘off watch’ on more than 70 occasions over the next 12 months.

To have mass resignations at one lifeboat station might be considered unfortunate, but to suffer at least seven such cases in a period of around 18 months is somewhat more worrying.

One possible explanation to the situation is, ironically, that the RNLI has become too popular for its own good — at least when it comes to fundraising.

The charity has enjoyed near universal support since its foundation in 1824. In addition to substantial public donations, sailing enthusiasts often leave the organisation a large bequest when they die.

Its most recent published accounts, for 2016, show income of £191 million, including £130 million from legacies — more than the £177 million it takes to run its 238 stations.

Overall assets (including property and boats) have grown to £712 million, of which £271 million is now held in ‘investments’.

In the past, the charity’s cash pile has spawned controversy. In 2001, a group of campaigning accountants called ‘Ethical Audit’ criticised it for having £200 million tucked away, arguing that many donors would not give if they knew the scale of its wealth.

The Charity Commission agreed that the figures were ‘on the high side’ and asked the RNLI to reduce them. So the charity came up with a way to dispose of cash: changing its historic remit from rescuing people at sea and on inland waterways to a role including ‘drowning prevention’.

The Times reported that the charity was ‘awash with so much money that it has decided to introduce Baywatch-style beach lifeguards, inland waterway patrols and a fleet of hovercraft’.

Seventeen years later, the RNLI employs 523 lifeguards in Britain. It has invested in a £25 million HQ at Poole with a roof in the shape of a wave and windows that resemble portholes — which was opened by the Queen in 2004.

Crucially, RNLI’s payroll has risen dramatically in other areas, too. In 1999, it had 750 employees, but within five years it had 1,000. By 2016 there were 2,366, with 35 senior executives earning more than £60,000, overseen by chief executive Paul Boissier, on a total package of £162,705.
Its French equivalent employs just 75 and 1,200 managerial roles are filled by volunteers.

Speak to disgruntled lifeboatmen and supporters, large numbers of whom contacted Mail columnist Richard Littlejohn after he highlighted the Whitby scandal last week, and you’ll hear a simple answer: many head office staff have become pointless jobsworths.

‘Like many big charities, the RNLI has become an empire builder’s dream,’ is how one fundraiser put it.

‘There are whole departments making up ridiculous health and safety protocols or human resources codes of conduct. It drives crews up the wall.’

They added that many are ‘third sector careerists with no knowledge of the sea, or what makes lifeboats tick, who try to import Left-wing values.

‘Lifeboatmen, who are often working-class lads, won’t buy it.’

Evidence of this apparent trend — typical of the way the Left has taken hold of so many public bodies — can perhaps be seen in the RNLI’s annual report.

Though it used to limit its operations to the UK and Ireland, the RNLI now boasts of running ‘drowning prevention programmes’ in Tanzania, Zanzibar, Bangladesh, Ghana and Lesbos. (The latter refers to helping migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats.) It talks of trying to ‘influence policy makers and partners’ and lobbying the UN to reduce deaths at sea.

It has a ‘new national team of health, safety and environment advisers’ winning ‘health and safety’ awards, speaks of creating a ‘diversity leadership group’ among staff and supporting the ‘International Day Against Homophobia.’

Posts currently advertised include a ‘safeguarding officer’ earning up to £41,926 — a job that generally involves responsibility for ‘health, safety and wellbeing’.

For lifeboat crews, the biggest recent change (and a key factor in squabbles) has been a ‘restructuring’ of middle management last year by a senior executive called Leesa Harwood, formerly of Save The Children, who was hired as the RNLI’s ‘community lifesaving and fundraising director’ on a salary of about £95,000.

The exercise created 42 ‘area lifesaving managers’ to supervise half a dozen lifeboat stations each.

As a result, there have been dramatic changes in the relationship between crews and RNLI HQ.

In the past, ‘regional managers’ responsible for dozens of stations would visit every six months. Under the new regime, local volunteers are inspected monthly or even weekly. That often causes friction.
According to Tom Clark, who was sacked after 34 of service: ‘Too many area managers, including the one who got rid of me, are young graduates who have never been to sea, and have no idea of the skill and effort required to be a lifeboatman. They rely on forms and procedures to make up for their lack of experience.’ As a result, volunteers such as Clark — nominated for an MBE by the RNLI in 2016 — complain of disciplinary investigations over breaches of protocol which, they say, would in previous years have been dealt with informally, if at all.

‘We are having our hands held by politically correct busybodies,’ is how one puts it.

In Clark’s case, one element that led to his sacking were claims that he swore at a colleague — an apparent breach of the RNLI’s code of conduct (‘Yes, I swore. It’s a rufytyfty place at sea and people do swear,’ he admits). Other lifeboatmen say this new culture of micromanagement means basic operations are preceded by risk assessments and team briefings.

‘Even to go out into the local bay to pick up some kid who’s floated away on a lilo, you need to use a flip chart and talk about contingency plans,’ complains one. ‘In the past, we just got the job done.

‘Now, coxswains must fill out forms confirming there’s a navigator and mechanic on board, and there has been a health and safety briefing. It’s all crazy box-ticking.’

At a Channel Islands lifeboat station, a volunteer medic upset his bosses by refusing to spend five days of his own time on a basic first aid course. As a local GP trained in acute care, he felt it unnecessary and resigned in protest.

To be fair to the RNLI, the number of crews known to be in conflict with HQ represents a small proportion of their overall total.

But it doesn’t explain the sheer nastiness of these disputes.

Which brings us back to Andy Hibbs, of Jersey, who fell foul of RNLI high command last year after a formal investigation into allegations that he’d launched a lifeboat without permission.

The claim was found to be untrue: Hibbs proved he was elsewhere on the day in question. But he was furious that the RNLI would not tell him who filed the original complaint. In April, he angrily emailed an RNLI manager saying ‘the whole thing was b*llocks’ and was sacked for breaking the charity’s ‘code of conduct’.

Public protests followed. Hibbs appealed against the sacking, and it was duly overturned — only for the RNLI to insist that a full-time employee from HQ had to be stationed in St Helier to oversee him.

After months of friction, in November the crew resigned.

It has since emerged, in internal RNLI documents, that the original complaint against Hibbs was made to RNLI chief executive Paul Boissier by Phil Buckley, then the harbour master at St Helier.
And this triggered more ill-feeling as Buckley and Boissier are longstanding acquaintances, who served together on Royal Navy submarines.

Meanwhile, the RNLI executive who presided over much of Mr Hibb’s treatment was Leesa Harwood, the community lifesaving and fundraising director responsible for the unpopular management restructuring. She announced her resignation the other day, though the charity says this was not related to recent events.

Nonetheless, many of our nation’s brave lifeboatmen dearly hope for a major change in the management culture at a much loved organisation which seems increasingly to find itself in choppy waters.