

Friday Jan. 20 2006 No.82

DON'T LET YOUR PENSION SLIP THROUGH YOUR FINGERS



Recall conference to discuss industrial action over pensions being planned to take place in Southport Thursday 16 February. Attend your branch meeting & express your view!

The Union is planning a conference on February 16 in Southport, as part of the campaign for industrial action the FBU intend to take in the face of planned detrimental changes to all FBU members' pensions.

The FBU Executive Council last week recommended a ballot for strike action over the issue.

The Union argues that your pension is your pay when you retire. So any attempt to cut or delay that pay should be treated like a pay cut.

Government plans to raise the minimum retirement age in our scheme from 50 to 55 for anyone retiring after 30 March 2013, cut ill-health retirement benefits, and make it more difficult to get a ill-health pension following an

injury in service. The retirement age for deferred pension will be raised to 65.

The Government promised to negotiate and not dictate changes to fire service pensions. They have not done so. The union has been repeatedly told that Ministers have taken key decisions which are NOT up for negotiation.

The Union wants you to back calls for industrial action.

An Executive Council Emergency Resolution to be put to the Recall Conference next month has been sent to all branches.

Attend your branch meeting, discuss and vote on this resolution.

DON'T LET YOUR FUTURE SLIP THROUGH YOUR FINGERS

Pensions: SDLP pledges support To Northern Ireland firefighters

Senior SDLP Stormont assembly member Patricia Lewsley today met with leading FBU representatives and was shocked to learn that alone amongst Emergency Service Workers, the Government in their plans for pensions reform have declined to offer ring-fencing in respect of existing firefighters!

Ms Lewsley, a longtime supporter of local firefighters, has pledged to have this anomaly raised in the assembly, in an effort to avert strike action in the fire service.

Unfair treatment

FBU Executive Council member for Northern Ireland, Jim Barbour said:

"John Prescott must be made to explain why the Fire Service is the only 999 Service that has not been offered ring-fenced protection for existing members.

"The Police and Ambulance workers have been granted this protection. So too have Teachers, Civil Servants, Health Service Workers, Judges and MPs!"

"This is a real kick in the teeth to local firefighters. Prescott is quick to publicly praise our performance, while at the same time, trying to pick-pocket our pensions."

Source: FBU Northern Ireland

Pensions: Scottish fire chief says strike move "not surprising"

Local fire board chairman Tom Coll has acknowledged the inconsistency in treatment between fire service employees and other public service workers and said it was "not surprising" the FBU had threatened strike action. He said:

"The matter is being pursued vigorously and will be an item for the special budget fire board meeting next Thursday. In my view, the proposal is inequitable and unsustainable. Not surprisingly, the FBU has threatened strike action."

Gordon McQuade, an FBU official for Central Scotland, warned of future industrial action. He said: "These are detrimental changes that are being forced on firefighters.

"We cannot understand how pension arrangements for nurses, teachers and police officers have been protected for existing members but firefighters, who have the same pension arrangements as the police, are being treated differently.

Government spiteful

"It appears that the Government is being spiteful when it comes to the fire service. We have asked ministers to answer that question but they have not replied. There will be no dispute if we are treated fairly and at the moment we are not."

www.icstirlingshire.icnetwork.co.uk

Herts fire station closure decision postponed

The date of the crunch meeting to decide the future of Radlett fire station has been postponed for one month.

The meeting has been put back to give the 77 Hertfordshire county councillors more time to assess the proposal to close the retained station, as part of a package of wider cost-cutting measures.

They will have a greater opportunity to consider the plans in the light of fierce opposition raised during a three-month consultation period, which ends later this month.

Radlett's station commander, Tony Smith, said: "It's our jobs at stake here and with that comes our lives, our homes and families. Let's just pray it's a good sign that they are giving it a closer look and, through this, they will finally see sense."

The meeting which was originally set for February 27 will now be held at County Hall, in Hertford, on March 28, where the plans drawn up by Hertfordshire's Chief Fire Officer, Roy Wilsher, will either be rubber-stamped or thrown out.

14 jobs on the line

If they are given the go-ahead, Radlett's 100-year-old village fire station will close on April 1 and its 14 firefighters will be made redundant.

County Councillor David Lloyd, who has executive responsibility for fire and rescue in the county, blamed the explosion at Buncefield Oil Depot in Hemel Hempstead last month, along with the festive season, for the delay in the decision-making process.

He said: "There's been a lot going on recently, some of the circumstances unpredicted."

www.thisislocallondon.co.uk

FBU vows to fight cuts in West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire FBU has vowed to defend the jobs of frontline firefighters which have been threatened by the local fire authority.

The authority claims a £2.8m budget shortfall it blames in part on a below-inflation central government funding increase, means it may have to axe jobs from central Government.

Officials at the authority told the local press that in anticipation of next year's difficulties, overtime requests are being refused and savings made to try to put aside some reserves that can be carried over into the 2006-07 financial year.

Following revelations of the possible cuts in the local media, the chief fire officer has agreed to meet FBU officials when the final grant is announced. The Union is extremely worried about any cuts.

Says Sean Cahill, Regional Secretary Yorkshire and Humberside: "We will be arguing that the Integrated Risk Management Plan that was recently approved was supposed to design fire cover to fit risk and not to fit budgets.

Service already suffered 25% reduction in firefighters

"A 25% reduction in firefighters in recent years - 1990-2005 - has already compromised West Yorkshire's ability to operate safely and efficiently. The cuts that have already occurred have been opposed by the FBU locally and we will continue to fight any further decline in front line firefighters.

"It is particularly annoying to our members who have undertaken additional risk reduction work in recent years in areas such as community fire safety only to be rewarded with stations closing and appliances taken off the run. This while consultants and auditors are making millions out of the so-called modernisation process."

FBU General Secretary adds support to Mexborough /Brampton closure campaign

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has urged members of the Fire Authority to reject a proposal to close Mexborough and Brampton fire stations - just a week before the decision is set to be made.

Under the Fire Service's proposal, the two stations would close and be replaced by a newly-built station in Wath. But this has provoked

widespread anger amongst Dearne Valley residents who claim it will result in poorer fire cover.

16,000-strong opposition

However Mr Wrack's public backing of the campaign, supported by a 16,000 signed petition from residents, is likely to put further pressure on the members of the Fire Authority who will meet next Wednesday to decide if the proposal goes ahead.

The General Secretary said: "I would urge the members of the Fire Authority to reconsider the proposal and to listen to what the community is saying.

"One of the major concerns we have is that the comments made in public consultation are dismissed at the end of the process. The whole point of having a public consultation is to listen to the views of the community."

Mexborough and Barnsley East MP Jeff Ennis has called for the Fire Authority to defer their decision on the proposal until more evidence can be presented.

www.dearnetoday.co.uk

London bosses on back foot

London Fire Brigade bosses have made a partial retreat in the dispute over new contracts by inviting London region FBU into "unconditional" talks, despite previously ruling out proper discussions on the matter.

The brigade has attempted to force new and different contracts on its employees, without agreement from the union. Despite the brigade's claims that the new contracts do not contain any "substantive" changes, the contracts differ significantly, particularly in such areas as the wording of duties and hours of work.

Unilateral imposition

The union has previously accused the brigade of breaching contract law on the issue, as brigade chiefs ignored their legal obligation to negotiate with the workforce on proposed changes and, instead, unilaterally imposed the new contracts.

The union subsequently launched legal proceedings in the High Court, and it is this that appears to have forced the brigade back to the negotiating table.

Source: The Organiser

Northumberland cuts to be debated in parliament

Labour MP for Blyth Valley Ronnie Campbell has secured an adjournment debate on the proposed cuts in Northumberland in the House of Parliament next week. The debate on fire cover in the brigade will take place next Wednesday.

Ronnie Campbell last year expressed concern in parliament that cuts under the local Integrated Risk Management Plans would result in increased response times and declared that Northumberland chief fire officer Brian Hesler "go back

to where he came from—Noddyland, where he produced his Noddy policy."

Solidarity with Notts members fighting co-responding

Nott members are paying a minimum voluntary levy of £5 per week into a Hardship Fund to assist the 34 members at Retford. Send your donation to:

BANK DETAILS: NAT WEST BANK PLC
ACCOUNT NAME: NOTTS HARSHIP FUND
ACCOUNT NO: 68013868
SORT CODE: 55 - 61 - 17

BNP trial: UAF calls for protest outside Leeds court

Unite Against Fascism has heard that the trial of British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin and BNP member Mark Collett, could finish on Wednesday 25 January or Thursday 26 January next week. UAF is calling a protest outside Leeds Combined Courts, Oxford Row, coinciding with the verdict.

It is currently uncertain precisely when the trial will finish. Be vigilant, check the UAF website - www.uaf.org.uk - or telephone the UAF office on 020 7833 4916 for the latest information.

A total of 1200 people joined the anti-fascist protest outside Leeds Crown Court and the rally on Monday 16 January. The rally was organised by the Yorkshire and Humberside TUC and Unite Against Fascism. The protest coincided with the start of BNP leader Nick Griffin and Mark Collett's trial, after the two were

charged with inciting racial hatred in April last year.

UAF Conference 18 February

Unite Against Fascism is organising this conference on **Saturday 18 Feb 2006 at TUC Conference Centre**, Great Russell Street, London WC1, to discuss why the BNP's vote has grown, effective strategies in stopping the BNP, and to bring together the different sections of the anti-fascist movement - including the trade unions, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and other faith, black, Asian, lesbian and gay communities and disabled people's organisations. To register contact the UAF (details above).

Iran can't have nukes but we'll have some more!

At a time when Western pressure is building on Iran not to develop nuclear weapons, Britain is considering a £25 billion replacement for the Trident nuclear weapons system. More nuclear weapons for the UK would be a come-on to every state on the planet to develop their own!

The £25 billion the Government plans to spend on Trident is more than 16 times the annual budget for the fire service - a service dedicated to saving lives, not taking them!

The massive £25 billion expenditure on warmongering is being considered by the same Government which tells us that our pensions are too costly and must be downsized!

Write to your MP to support CND's early day motion - EDM 1197
Replacement for Trident Weapons - calling for the fullest possible public debate on a decision to replace Trident, including a debate and deciding vote in parliament. Go to the FBU website www.fbu.org.uk and follow the Lobby Your MP link. For more on CND's campaign visit www.cnduk.org. 71 MPs have signed so far.

Stop the slaughter of trade unionists - Stop UK military aid to Colombia

If you think we're under attack here - and there's no doubt of that - it's even worse for trade unionists and workers in Colombia.

The most recent figures show that 99 trade unionists were murdered in the South American country in 2004 alone. Firefighters, teachers, community workers and predominantly poor men, women and children have also been the victims of assassinations and terrible human rights abuses in Colombia.

Encourage your MP to sign Justice for Colombia/TUC's EDM number 355, which calls on the British Government to end their secretive military assistance project in Colombia. Visit www.fbu.org.uk and follow the 'Lobby Your MP' link. For more on the campaign visit: www.justiceforcolombia.org

Get the e-bulletin and other FBU campaign news by email. Go to www.fbu.org.uk, type in your email address on the bottom left hand side of the home page and hit the "Sign Up" button.