

PENSIONS : DELEGATES DECIDE NOT TO STRIKE OVER ODPM PROPOSALS



Recall conference recognises revised proposals represent best achievable pension arrangements at this time but vowed to continue campaigning for improvements in FBU members' pensions.

Delegates at the FBU recall conference last Wednesday 22 March agreed not to launch a strike ballot to oppose the ODPM's proposals on firefighters' pensions but vowed to continue pressing for improvements to FBU members' pensions.

The recall conference made it clear it did not support the ODPM's revised proposals but agreed that they represented the best achievable pension arrangements for FBU members at this time.

It also decided that should current negotiations with the ODPM to grant access to the new Firefighters Pensions Scheme for Emergency Fire

Control Staff break down or fail to produce a result that is satisfactory, then the Executive Council would meet immediately to discuss the launch of a ballot for strike action.

Furthermore, delegates agreed that the Union would campaign against the detrimental proposals contained with the draft Guidance for Selected Independent Qualified Medical Practitioners (IQMPs) undertaking an assessment to determine permanent disablement for role and capacity for regular work and demanded that the FBU be included in any consultation/negotiation of the final document. Should these

negotiations break down or fail to produce a result that is satisfactory, then the Executive Council would immediately to discuss the launch of a ballot for strike action.

The other areas the union would keep campaigning on are:

- Ill-health retirements
- New FPS retirement age of 60
- Transitional period between existing FPS being withdrawn for new entrants and the New FPS being put in place

Following the conference General Secretary Matt Wrack said:

"FBU members have debated this issue throughout the UK. The decision of the conference means that there will not be a ballot for strike action on the issue of pensions. We have made some progress on a number of issues in relation to the Firefighters Pension Scheme including the withdrawal of the threat to increase the minimum retirement age for current members.

"Nevertheless pensions will continue to be a key issue for us - as it always has been. We will continue to campaign for improvements to the new scheme, such as a reduction in the normal retirement age. We will continue to campaign on the issue of ill-health retirements. We will be monitoring the changing costs very closely and will argue that any savings made should be used to fund improvements."

The following two resolutions were passed:

Emergency Resolution 1

Conference applauds all FBU members and officials for their participation in the campaign to defend pension rights and notes that a number of improvements have been achieved on the proposals for pensions.

Conference accepts that the ODPM's revised proposals represent the best achievable pension arrangements for FBU members at this time and agrees that a ballot for strike action does not take place.

However, conference also notes the talks currently taking place at the ODPM to grant access to the new Firefighters Pensions Scheme for Emergency Fire Control Staff. If these talks should break down or should fail to produce a result that is satisfactory, Conference instructs the Executive Council to meet immediately to discuss the launch of a ballot for strike action.

(Proposed by Executive Council,
Seconded by Northern Ireland)

Emergency Resolution 2

Conference accepts that the ODPM's revised proposals represent the best achievable pension arrangements for FBU members at this time and agrees that a ballot for strike action does not take place.

However, Conference notes that the Guidance for Selected Independent

Qualified Medical Practitioners (IQMPs) undertaking an assessment to determine permanent disablement for role and capacity for regular work is still in draft form.

Conference demands that the FBU must be included in any consultation/negotiation of the final document, and campaigns in opposition to the detrimental proposals contained within the draft.

If negotiations should break down or should fail to produce a result that is satisfactory, Conference instructs the Executive Council to meet immediately to discuss the launch of a ballot for strike action.

(Northamptonshire, Seconded by Derbyshire)

For details of the ODPM's revised pension proposals see the March 2006 issue of Firefighter Magazine, or click here:

http://www.fbu.org.uk/newspress/ffmag/2006/0306/ff_mar_06_pl2.pdf

FBU in solidarity with local government strike

FBU officials and members across the country showed solidarity with the local government workers on March 28 and pledged their support for the striking workers' case to protect their pensions.

The strike on Tuesday over proposed detrimental changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme involved 11 unions co-ordinated by Unison and over a million public sector workers. It paralysed schools,

libraries, leisure centres and transport networks across the country.

Matt Wrack and President Ruth Winters attended a picket line in Hertfordshire (see below for FBU rally against cuts in the brigade).

Control Campaign

The Union's campaign against the proposed regionalisation of controls is moving into a critical stage. It is expected that the Select Committee inquiry into a number of aspects of Fire Service work including regional controls, will report sometime in May, most likely following local elections.

All members are requested to contact their MPs to seek support for the position outlined in the Unions document titled "Regional Control : National Resilience".

A suggested draft letter is available on www.controlcare.org.uk The letter can also be sent using the "Lobby Your MP" facility on the [FBU website](http://www.fbu.org.uk).

As many members as possible should contact their MPs as it has been shown, following our recent Pensions campaign, to have a positive impact.

Herts crews condemn cuts move as stab in the back

Hertfordshire fire crews have condemned the decision to press ahead with cuts and station closures as "a stab in the back". They said the decision was a bad

day for the public and the fire service.

The cuts approved will mean:

Cuts at nights and weekends, fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to 999 calls.

It will lead to the loss of 50 frontline firefighters, the closure of Radlett and Bovington stations and downgrading of cover at Watford and Royston.

Stevenage Hemel Hempstead and St Albans would lose a total of 12 frontline posts and 5 command and control officer posts would also go. Almost all of the stations were among the first to respond to the Buncefield fire.

Tony Smith, vice-chair of Herts FBU said: "This is dreadful news for the Herts fire and rescue service. These cuts will impact on public safety and our safety.

"They queued up to praise us after Buncefield. This time they queued up to stab us in the back.

Public will be baffled

"There is genuine and deep felt anger among fire crews. The public do not support these cuts and they will be baffled they have been given the green light.

"These cuts will rip the heart out of the Hertfordshire fire and rescue service. We will be responding more slowly to 999 calls

with fewer firefighters and with less rescue equipment available.

"That's why the vast majority of professionals in the Hertfordshire fire service oppose these cuts. Fire crews from all over the county will be meeting to decide our next move and we have not ruled out industrial action."

Heroes to zeros

Speaking to 150 firefighters from several brigades who attended the demo outside Herts County Hall general secretary Matt Wrack said:

"When I visited the Buncefield site at the invitation of the chief fire officer I saw a scene of devastation. Everyone was being patted on the back then.


"These cuts will mean getting rid of the jobs of those who fought that fire. And if you want cuts you get a worse service.

"The County Council needs to listen to firefighters, those who are in the front line. It needs to listen to the communities and the public who also oppose these cuts.

"We're willing to talk to the chair of the fire authority and the chief fire officer. We can look at ways of resolving this issue without resorting to cuts and closures."

Public services not private profit

The FBU and a raft of other public sector unions have launched



a campaign to defend public services.

This campaign aims to bring together trade unions from across the public sector, linked to supportive MPs, and organisations representing those who depend upon our public services. It is supported by ASLEF, CWU, CYWU, FBU, LRC, NAPO, NATFHE, NUJ, NUS, NUT, PCS, POA, RMT, TSSA.

Privatisation and job cuts

Public services and public service workers are facing unprecedented pressure from Government plans for privatisation and job cuts. Across virtually every area of public service and with virtually no consultation, proposals are being brought forward to hand over services to the private sector at seemingly no matter what the cost to either the taxpayer or service users.

In health, education, local government, prisons and probation and in every department of central government the Government is forcing services into the private sector. The Government's Education & Inspections Bill is just the most recent example of the threat to the very concept of public service. Even where the private sector has failed and services taken back into the public sector, as in the railways, the Government is re-privatising them!

Hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake. The pay, pensions and conditions of employment of public service workers are under threat.

Services which our community relies upon are at risk.

The present attack on public services is on such a scale that we are in danger of witnessing the undermining of the very concept of public service provision in this country.

A rally and launch took place yesterday, Wednesday 29 March 2006, in the House of Commons. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack spoke alongside:

John McDonnell MP (Chair)
Billy Hayes (CWU) Doug Nicholls (CYWU) Judy McKnight (NAPO) Paul Mackney (NATFHE) Jeremy Dear (NUJ) Steve Sinnott (NUT) Mark Serwotka (PCS) Colin Moses (POA) Manuel Cortes (TSSA)

There will also be a Rally & Mass Lobby of Parliament: 11am-4pm, 27th June, Central Hall, Westminster.

Chancellor Brown launches massive expansion of PFI

The chancellor Gordon Brown is planning a £26bn expansion of the private finance initiative across 200 public sector projects.

Mr Brown's 10th budget - unveiled last week - revealed that the public sector has so far signed 700 PFI projects.

Over the next four to five years the government plans to begin another 200 projects worth a total of £26bn, representing the largest programme of its kind in the world.

www.guardian.co.uk

PFI in the fire service

PFI contracts worth in excess of £300 million have been signed in the UK fire and rescue service since 1997, when the first round of bidding was launched, according to ODPM figures.

The PFI programme has been used primarily to build new fire stations and headquarters, but also to build and operate training centres and, in London, to manage vehicles and specialist equipment.

PFI has been excluded as an option in the Outline Business Case for regional control since "the deal the London Fire Service reached to open its new control centre last year...was so costly," (FireControl, Outline Business Case)

One key weakness of PFI in the fire service, according to a 2004 study by consultants Cap Gemini, was the "protracted procurement process".

The average time taken for the PFI procurement process for signed contracts was 2 years 8 months from submission of Outline Business Case to commercial close. This compares with around one year to complete from expression of interest for traditional procurement.

The worst example has been South Wales, which has taken over six years from OBC to commercial close.

The longer the process, the higher the costs for the Fire Authorities (in particular on external advisers) as well as for the bidders.

This is particularly a problem for small schemes where proportionately high procurement costs already call into question the value for money of PFI, Cap Gemini concluded.

Stop schools going up in flames

Five schools go up in flames every day on average in the UK.

An early day motion (EDM), recently tabled by Celia Barlow MP, a member of the FBU Parliamentary Support Group, notes that "more than 2,000 schools are damaged by fire each year at an estimated cost of £100 million to local education authorities" and "calls upon the Government to broaden its recommendations to make the installation of sprinklers in all new build and major refurbishments of maintained schools mandatory."

Write to your MP asking them to sign early day motion EDM 1726 - Water sprinklers in Schools. Follow the Lobby Your MP link from the home page of the FBU website - www.fbu.org.uk or click here: <http://www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/political/epetition.php>.

In October 2004, the FBU and the National Union of Teachers called for the installation of sprinklers in new school buildings - and during refurbishments - to be made a legal requirement.

TU Freedom Bill campaign moves forward

Calls for a Trade Union Freedom Bill are now firmly on the political agenda and are cascading

through the structures of the trade union movement.

On the legal front, John Hendy QC has been working through the Institute of Employment Rights to develop the legal details of the Bill.

In Parliament, John McDonnell and his team have been winning support for the associated Early Day Motion (Number 1170) and have already secured 119 signatures.

Clarion call for May Day

Trade unions and the TUC have discussed and agreed the main principles of the Bill and the Bill is to be the main clarion call for this year's national and regional May Day events.

In addition, a number of trade union conferences have motions supporting the Trade Union Freedom Bill on the agenda and are organising fringe meetings to discuss the content and implications of the Bill with their active members.

In Parliament, the technical work continues with a focus on the drafting details. It's expected that when the Bill is presented trade unionists will turn out in force to express their opposition to the continuation of today's anti trade union laws and their support for a Trade Union Freedom Bill.

And the timing couldn't be better. It's hoped the Bill will be presented to Parliament around the anniversary of the Trade Disputes Act. It was that Liberal Act of

1906, which protected unions against sequestration of funds and imprisonment.

Less free than 100 years ago

Today, trade union freedom to call industrial action is less than it was 100 years ago, despite such freedoms being enshrined in international law for the last 50 years. In November 2004 the UK's Joint Committee on Human Rights agreed that UK laws on the right to strike are failing to meet our international obligations and the Committee called on the government to "review the laws" in light of those criticisms.

For trade unionists, this Bill is about giving them the tools, when required, to ensure their members receive fairness at work.

So what will the Trade Union Freedom Bill contain? There are five basic principles:

- Better protection for striking workers
- Simpler and fairer industrial action balloting and notice procedures
- Restricted use of injunctions by employers
- Allowing solidarity action in certain circumstances
- Preventing the use of replacement labour during strikes

Seek your MP's support for a Trade Union Freedom Bill. Follow the "Lobby Your MP" link on the FBU website or click below: www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/political/epetition.php

For more info click below:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=29530&SESSION=875>

www.ier.org.uk

Want an extra paid holiday?

The FBU has joined other unions, including the TGWU, in campaigning for International Women's Day - celebrated on 8 March - to be made a paid bank holiday for everyone. Sign the FBU petition by visiting www.fbu.org.uk or by clicking on this link: www.fbu.org.uk/aboutus/political/petition.php and selecting "petitions".

For a hard copy of the petition and more information on the campaign contact FBU Head Office.

Don't take the knocks alone.

Call

0800 783 4778

FBU confidential Stress Helpline

Get the e-bulletin and other FBU campaign news by email. Visit www.fbu.org.uk, type in you email address in the bottom left hand side of the homepage and "Sign Up". It takes less than 2 minutes.

FBU freephone legal advice line

0808 100 6061

For advice on personal injury, family law, wills conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU rep.