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To: **All Members**

Dear Brother/Sister,

Labour Party general election manifesto on the anti-union laws

On 13 June, the Labour Party published its manifesto, titled Change, for the general election on Thursday 4 July. This is a pivotal moment for firefighters and the FBU. Our members have the right to vote for their MP and to directly influence who sits in the Houses of Parliament and who forms the next Westminster government.

The Labour manifesto states:

“Labour will stop the chaos and turn the page to create a partnership between business and trade unions, by implementing ‘Labour’s Plan to Make Work Pay: Delivering a New Deal for Working People’ in full – introducing legislation within 100 days. We will consult fully with businesses, workers, and civil society on how to put our plans into practice before legislation is passed. This will include banning exploitative zero hours contracts; ending fire and rehire; and introducing basic rights from day one to parental leave, sick pay, and protection from unfair dismissal. We will strengthen the collective voice of workers, including through their trade unions, and create a Single Enforcement Body to ensure employment rights are upheld. These changes will improve the lives of working people across the entire UK.”

Labour’s Plan to Make Work Pay states:

“Over the past 14 years, the Conservatives have consistently attacked rights at work, including through the Trade Union Act 2016, the Minimum Service Levels (Strikes) Bill and the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations 2022 – all of which Labour will repeal to give trade unions the freedom to organise, represent and negotiate on behalf of their workers.”

The last 14 years

Labour's promises are in stark contrast to the policies of Conservative-led governments at Westminster over the last 14 years.

In the last year, the Westminster government imposed the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act on firefighters and other public sector workers. These new laws make it difficult or impossible for firefighters and emergency control staff to take lawful strike action, even if members have voted overwhelmingly for it. The new laws put individual firefighters at risk of the sack over a work notice and heavy fines on the FBU if effective strike action takes place.

In 2016, the Trade Union Act imposed new and higher thresholds for ballots, to make it harder for firefighters to take strike action. It introduced tougher rules on balloting, longer notice periods and new rules on picketing to obstruct legal industrial action.

Firefighters have faced other regular attacks on our rights. In 2016, Adrian Thomas published his Westminster-commissioned review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England, demanding ministers remove or restrict firefighters' right to strike. In 2022, HMICFRS published its State of Fire and Rescue 2021 report. Chief inspector Thomas Winsor raised the proposal to ban firefighters from taking lawful industrial action.

In 2010, Conservative mayor Boris Johnson and the London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson imposed section 188 fire and rehire notices on London firefighters and emergency control staff in a dispute about shift patterns. Firefighters in South Yorkshire had faced down similar threats a year earlier. And in 2016, West Midlands firefighters also faced fire and rehire. These attacks were only defeated because of resolute industrial action, or preparation for industrial action, by FBU members.

Critical engagement - let's continue the campaign

The FBU is affiliated to the Labour Party in England and Wales. FBU officials have contributed to the Labour Party's internal democratic discussions over the last nine years, such as its annual conference, the National Policy Forum (NPF) and the Trade Union Liaison Organisation (TULO), in order to fight for FBU policies.

The FBU has many more demands beyond those in Labour's manifesto, including scrapping all the anti-unions and implementing positive legal rights for workers. If the Labour Party forms the next government at Westminster, then they have pledged to remove some of the major shackles on firefighters and other workers to stand up for ourselves. That is welcome.

A number of the FBU's demands are reflected in the Labour's pledges. The job of the union is to hold the party to account and ensure it implements the policies it has agreed to. There are also opportunities to campaign on other issues of concern to our members and our union.

Whatever happens in the general election, our fight for the rights of firefighters and other workers will continue.

Yours in unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Wrack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary