

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL RESOLUTION TO RE-CALL CONFERENCE:

FBU Political Engagement Strategy

Conference notes that since the general election of May 2015, the Conservative government has renewed the attacks on our service, our profession and our union. Fire and rescue services face a further round of horrific cuts, which will devastate local services and undermine the safety of firefighters and the public. The ultimate aim in all this is to privatise as much of the fire and rescue service as possible.

Alongside other public sector workers, firefighters also face another four years of pay restraint, when living standards have already been cut following the 2007/08 banking crisis and the austerity policies that followed.

In addition, the government is seeking to weaken our ability to resist what they do to us. They are doing this through their attack on workers' rights in the Trade Union Bill.

The situation facing firefighters, other workers and the public across the UK is bleak. The scale of attacks on wages, pensions, public services and civil rights are unprecedented in recent history. To resist will require a huge campaign beyond any single union, requiring an alliance of trade unions, community groups, campaign groups and politicians supporting the labour and trade union movement.

Politics lies behind these attacks

Conference notes that behind all these attacks there are *political* decisions. The Tories want to resolve the economic problems arising from the banking crisis at the expense of workers and at the expense of public services. They also seek to take the opportunity to fundamentally shift power and resources away from workers and into the hands of the wealthy few. This is what lies behind the politics of 'austerity'. In the fire and rescue service, like all other public services, all the key decisions are *political* decisions. Politics affects every aspect of our lives as firefighters, as workers and as citizens.

Unfortunately, for many years any resistance by unions has been weakened as a result of failures by the leadership of the Labour Party. The FBU disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 2004 following our long and bitter dispute under the Blair government. We will never forget that. Nor will we forget the failures of Labour politicians at local level who have systematically implemented the cuts demanded by central government.

Regardless of which party is in power at national or local level the Fire Brigades Union must proudly and unapologetically defend our service and our members against all attacks, wherever they originate.

The Corbyn election

Conference notes that following a remarkable turn of events over the summer of 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was elected as leader of the Labour Party. It is important for the union to consider the new situation and to consider our political strategy in the light of it.

Jeremy Corbyn has been one of the firmest supporters of the FBU at Westminster for the past three decades. Corbyn has been an active member of the FBU's parliamentary group since it was founded and a frequent contributor on fire service matters on the floor of the House of Commons. He is a strong supporter of trade union rights who opposes the current Trade Union Bill and also wants the repeal of existing anti-union legislation.

Jeremy Corbyn has stood up for firefighters at Westminster by opposing both this Tory government's and the coalition government's austerity agenda, as well as the cuts imposed by the last Labour government. Corbyn has strongly backed the FBU in our pensions campaign, has stood with our members on picket lines and intervened at Westminster to make our case. His consistent support for our union goes back as far as the 1977 pay strike.

The FBU was among the first trade unions to pledge support for Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership race, even before he had reached the required number of MPs to join the contest. The union supported Corbyn from the beginning because of his record of support for our union and its members. The union provided material support to his campaign, including our FBU fire engine that was visible at many rallies. The FBU and many of our officials, whether individual members of the Labour Party or not, contributed actively to the success of his campaign.

Different situations in different parts of the union

Conference notes that devolution has significantly altered the political landscape facing us. Even when the union was affiliated to the Labour Party in the past, the situation was somewhat different for FBU members in Northern Ireland since the Labour Party does not stand candidates there. More recently, the most significant changes have been seen in Scotland, and this has been reflected in the growth in support for independence and in support for the SNP. The political situation in Wales is also different to that at Westminster. These important factors need to be considered as a part of the FBU political strategy as a whole.

Conference agrees that a different political approach is necessary in relation to FBU strategy in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Labour's structure and affiliation

The Labour Party has an organic link with the trade union movement stretching back over a century. This was why the FBU affiliated to the Labour Party in the 1920s. It was founded as a party of workers, aiming to represent workers' interests, funded by unions and giving workers a voice in parliament. The Labour Party is a unique type of party, different from liberal, green, nationalist or radical parties, because of the place of organised labour within its structures.

Affiliation to the Labour Party (with a different approach in Scotland and Northern Ireland) would mean that the FBU would use *some* of our political fund money to contribute to the Labour Party. This would give our union a role in structures such as Labour conferences and other decision-making bodies.

Firefighters need a political voice in the Labour Party (with a different approach in Scotland and Northern Ireland) because we have interests in common with other workers, and conflicts with other forces and parties in government and industry. Currently, thousands of trade unionists are binding together around the Corbyn campaign. Together with the enthusiasm of wide layers of youth and other campaigners these factors could transform the labour movement in the months ahead.

Political debate and the fire and rescue service

An affiliation to the Labour Party now gives the FBU a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help set the wider political debate on fire and rescue service funding, firefighters' pay and conditions, fire service governance, national standards, firefighter safety and the whole range of wider issues faced by our members. It also gives us an opportunity to counter the wider attacks of austerity, privatisation and the anti-union laws that directly affect our members and our ability to defend ourselves.

Conference believes that the time is right now to re-affiliate to the Labour Party (with a different approach in Scotland and Northern Ireland) because the FBU can play a central role in the debates now going on within the party and the country about the direction Labour under Corbyn will take. From the inside, we will be able to shape and intervene in those debates and have more effective influence than from the outside.

The time is right now because Corbyn's fate will have an enormous impact on the future of our service and our union. If Corbyn thrives we have the possibility to stem the tide and start to make real gains for FBU members. The FBU has the opportunity to play an active, positive role in creating better circumstances to fight for firefighters' interests.

Concerns about re-affiliation

Conference notes that re-affiliation does ***not mean*** individual FBU members would become Labour Party members, or necessarily pay towards the party or have to vote for it. Individual FBU members would be free to pursue their own political activities as before.

Conference notes that re-affiliation ***does not*** prevent the FBU from engaging with politicians from other parties in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, where conditions are different to England because of devolution. Indeed the FBU has always engaged with a wide range of politicians and this will need to continue.

Conference notes that re-affiliation ***does not*** prevent the FBU from criticising the Corbyn-led Labour Party or individual Labour MPs, councillors or other representatives. The union will be the voice of firefighters within the Labour Party and fight for firefighters' interests, without fear or favour. This will include challenging councillors who support or vote for cuts in our service.

Conference condemns the extreme political attack being meted out by the Conservative Government on firefighters, the fire and rescue service, other vital public services and on civil liberties. Conference applauds the clear, political opposition to that attack being loudly voiced by the current leadership of the Labour Party. Therefore, Conference resolves to affiliate to the Labour Party.

Conference agrees that this affiliation shall not mean affiliation to the Labour Party in Northern Ireland or to the Scottish Labour Party and ***no political fund resources*** from members in Scotland or Northern Ireland shall be used for any such purposes.