FIRE BRIGADES UNION

November 2015

BULLETIN

UNDER ATTACK AND FIGHTING BACK

Introduction from Matt Wrack

Our fire and rescue service is under attack as never before.

We have never experienced the level of cuts, closures and job losses we are seeing today. No part of our service, no part of our union is exempt. The cuts are taking different forms in different places but we are all facing the same onslaught.

The background to this is the aim of the Conservative government to force through their austerity agenda. The economy in the UK – and worldwide – suffered a huge shock as a result of the banking crisis of 2007/8 and has still not recovered from the crisis which followed. Austerity policies are an attempt to resolve economic problems at the expense of working people. These policies drive down wages and living standards and attack public services. They mean that the majority are forced to pay for an economic mess they did not create.

These policies are hitting our service and our profession in numerous ways. Wages are being forced down through pay freezes, pensions are attacked and local



services are being cut to shreds. Standards of emergency response are being completely undermined.

Our fight back needs to be on two levels.

Firstly we need to make a strong and professional case for investment in order to deliver a modern fire and rescue service with professional standards in training, equipment and risk planning, and with professional pay for those who deliver the service.

We also need to be part of a much wider campaign. The attacks we are facing are not unique - millions of other workers are facing them, especially in public services. We need to help build a mass campaign of industrial and political opposition to stop the Tories in their tracks.

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#STOPTHECUTS



OUR PAY UNDER ATTACK

George Osborne's July 2015 budget included a further four year pay freeze for all 5.4 million public sector workers, with rises limited to a maximum 1%.

2014 was the sixth consecutive year of falling real pay for UK workers. Osborne's plans add up to £5 billion in pay cuts by 2019 - that's £5 billion out of the pockets of firefighters and other public sector workers; more hardship for firefighters and their families.

The FBU will campaign and fight against a further period of pay cuts and falling living standards with the wider trade union movement. Together with other trade unions, the FBU will campaign to defeat these attacks on living standards.

OUR UNION FIGHTING BACK FOR A MODERN PROFESSIONAL FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The FBU has been discussing the future of our service and of firefighters with our employers for some time. We have looked at new areas of work and areas of activity that are being undertaken but which are not reflected currently in firefighters' pay. These discussions have focussed on five work streams agreed upon through the National Joint Council (NJC). They are:

- **Multi agency working (largely in response to terrorist attacks)**
- **Youth and social engagement**
- **Environmental challenges**
- **Emergency medical response**
- **Inspection and enforcement**

There are various areas of disagreement with our employers but these discussions form the background to current debates about funding and pay. The FBU argues that we need a modern, professional fire and rescue service, planning for the risks facing communities in the 21st century. It won't be delivered through endless cuts or wage reduction, but by investment, professional standards and decent pay. This is our aim for a top quality fire and rescue service.



OUR SERVICE REPORTS FROM THE FRONTLINE

- **Seven thousand firefighter jobs cut since 2010**
- **40 fire stations have been closed and scores of fire engines axed**
- **Slower response times**
- **Corners cut in emergency response**

Pete Wilcox, regional secretary of the FBU in the North East, said: "We are seeing a barrage of job losses and cuts which, together with the threat of mutualisation, privatisation and mergers hamper the ability of firefighters to provide the public with the professional service they deserve.

"We are constantly made to feel the moral responsibility for cuts to the fire service. We'll be the ones picking up the pieces when a fire crew doesn't make it to a fire in time to save a life, not politicians. We need to make them listen, and that means every single FBU member actively lobbying their local MP."

Graeme Higgins, brigade secretary of the FBU in Cumbria, said: "Cuts here are hitting rural communities hard with the potential closure of five rural fire stations, job losses and equipment cuts. Inadequate fire cover will put the lives of vulnerable and elderly people in isolated communities at risk.

"Between 2005 and 2009 Cumbria faced three major incidents caused by flooding, plus a train derailment. We fear that the Fire and Rescue Service may be unable to cope if there was a repeat of this.

"It is the job of every firefighter to speak out and campaign against these incredibly dangerous proposals. The public trust firefighters more than politicians - when firefighters speak the public listens."

Steve Howley, brigade secretary of the FBU in North Yorkshire, said: "North Yorkshire firefighters helped local lady Lucy Morgan when she suffered burns in a bonfire accident in March 2014. Fire chiefs in North Yorkshire want to get rid of fire engines and replace them with smaller, van-like Tactical Response Vehicles carrying fewer firefighters and less equipment. If a Tactical Response Vehicle had turned up to the scene where Lucy was injured, her injuries could have been far worse.

"Lucy is now appearing in a campaign video against cuts. It's people like Lucy I think about when campaigning against cuts. We are a humanitarian, life-saving service. When we get cut, the public suffer. We need to let politicians know that. Our campaign against the cuts has hit a chord with the public here. Parish and District councils are now backing the campaign to stop the cuts."

#DEFENDWORKERSRIGHTS

WORKERS' RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK
OUR UNION UNDER ATTACK

The Tory government has launched a fresh onslaught against workers' rights and their trade unions through the Trade Union Bill.

They want to attack our unions financially, politically and industrially, making it harder than ever to organise ourselves at work. This includes new thresholds for industrial action which most politicians do not achieve. They intend to allow employers to break strikes using agency workers. They plan to intimidate individual workers through new requirements on picketing and protest. They intend to attack your union funds by giving government officials new powers to investigate and fine trade unions.

FIGHTING BACK

The FBU is campaigning vigorously with other unions to stop the bill becoming law, and we have taken part in rallies and demonstrations to that end. The FBU website has a section on campaigning to defend workers' rights which suggests how you can assist.

THE ATTACK ON HOW YOU PAY YOUR UNION SUBS
SIGN UP FOR DIRECT DEBIT

Part of the campaign to undermine our unions is the intention to attack union funds and membership by banning the current 'check-off' arrangements. This is where union members pay their contributions by deduction from salary. Most FBU members pay their membership contributions this way. It is a voluntary agreement between the individual worker, the employer and the union. The FBU currently pays a fee to each of our employers for the administration of check-off.

The Tories aim to ban these arrangements. This is a blatant attempt to weaken trade union organisation. In order to prepare for this the FBU, along with other unions, is launching a campaign to ask members to sign up for direct debit arrangements to replace check-off. Further details will be issued very soon.