

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ www.fbu.org.uk

April 2015



5,000 firefighter jobs cut
More than 40 fire stations closed
Living standards squeezed
Public sector pensions attacked

7 MAY

**VOTE
THEM OUT**





Matt Wrack

A government that lies and steals – vote them out!

As we go to press the campaign for the general election is getting under way. This is an opportunity for voters, including FBU members, to hold all politicians to account. It is an opportunity to place demands on them and to influence the direction of the next Parliament.

The record of the Tory/Liberal Democrat government is appalling. It has overseen the slowest economic recovery since records began. This means that living standards have still not recovered from the banking crisis of 2007/8. It will take years more for workers to recover what has been lost. The entire strategy of Cameron, Osborne and Clegg has been to make working people pay for the bankers' crisis. Tragically, they have largely got away with it. Living standards have suffered for the majority while profits and bonuses have been restored for those at the top.

It is clear that a further Conservative – or Conservative-led coalition – government will mean more of the same: more cuts; more privatisation; and a continuing attack on wages and living standards. In addition, there would be very serious attacks on trade unions. It is clear to all that the FBU is very much a target for the Tories.

The fire and rescue service has seen the worst cuts ever during the past five years. Regrettably, those running the fire and rescue service have not



2010: An electioneering David Cameron on the eve of the poll promised firefighters in Carlisle that there would be no cuts to 'emergency frontline staff' if he won.
2015: 5,000 firefighter job losses later ...

stood up to defend the vital role our members play in keeping communities safe. This includes the situation in Scotland. We were promised by the Scottish government that a new single service would protect jobs and services. After two years that has not been the case and job losses in Scotland are as bad as in many other parts of the UK. So, whatever happens in May, we will need to campaign as never before in order to defend our profession and our service.

If cuts continue, the very future of our service would be threatened. So it is important that we vote and it is in the interest of firefighters and all workers that the Conservatives are defeated. The only realistic alternative in the current situation is a Labour government or Labour-led

coalition. That is not something that sits easily with me. I will recall the failures of the Blair/Brown government and the attacks they launched on our members and our union. I am not a member of the Labour Party and – while there were honourable exceptions – I will certainly never forget the disgraceful record of attacks on public services. Nor should any of us.

So, whatever happens in May, we are going to have to fight to defend living standards, jobs and public services. We should not be under any illusions about the promises made by any of the major parties. If we want to make progress on anything we will have to fight for a major change of direction in British politics. Nevertheless, it is

essential to defeat the Tories in May and the most viable alternative is a Labour government.

Essex

The emergency control staff in Essex have been inspirational in their battle against an imposed shift system that has already forced some of their colleagues out of work.

They have also highlighted the potentially catastrophic issue of IT mobilising systems not being tested properly before they are implemented.

I know that every FBU member will be supporting Essex emergency control staff as they make a stand for workers' rights and public safety. You can read their experiences on the news focus page (7).

Contents

Fighting for rights and justice

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack addresses striking firefighters in Whitehall



Essex emergency control staff on strike

News

- 4** Thomas review 'attack on all firefighters'
- 5** FBU helps firefighter win six-figure compensation
MP at FBU LGBT school
- 6** Minister refuses debate
MPs back FBU on floods
Stress risk for emergency service staff

Features

- 10 Pressure on Parliament**
Thousands of firefighters bring Westminster to a halt

14 Your vote matters

FBU analysis of the forthcoming general election

Regulars

- 5 Sounding off**
Defending the right to protest
- 7 Focus**
Essex emergency control staff strike over attacks on jobs and conditions
- 8 Aerial ladder platform**
How blacklisting ruins lives

18 Health and safety

Charity seeks volunteers to help develop mental health training

19 Legal Beagle

The law, pensions and workers' rights

20 Day off

Firefighter Stevie McCrorie is a favourite in *The Voice*

22 Puzzles

Win Kiehl's hair and body care products

23 Station Cat

The news they don't want you to hear

24 25-year badges

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FBU members protested against fire minister Penny Mordaunt. Matt Wrack (left) addressed the LGA conference to criticise the Thomas review.

FBU: Thomas review an attack on all firefighters

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack has condemned a government instigated review of firefighters' conditions as a party political initiative that will be "weaponised" in the run up to the election.

He was addressing this year's Local Government Association fire conference in Gateshead.

The author of the review, Adrian Thomas, who also spoke at the conference, was appointed by Westminster fire minister Penny Mordaunt.

Its terms of reference, staff and chair were chosen by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It is widely seen as a response to the FBU's campaign to defend firefighters' pensions.

In his speech Matt Wrack was critical of the nature, rationale, methods and timing of the Thomas review. He questioned

the validity of the surveys it used to gather evidence as they were drawn up without discussion with anyone from the fire service – either employers or employees.

Wrack said the central threat of the review was to firefighters' nationally agreed pay and conditions. "National bargaining provides stability, is cost effective, strategic and efficient," he said. "There is no appetite within the fire and rescue service for cumbersome, duplicative and bureaucratic local or regional systems of pay."

FBU investigation

In preparation for the review, the FBU carried out its own investigation through the polling company YouGov and found that firefighters value the national arrangements for negotiating pay and conditions with five in six in favour of a national pay structure.

With nearly 10,000 responses the

YouGov survey, completed in December 2014, is the most representative survey of firefighters' conditions in recent memory and was subjected to the vigorous scrutiny of an independent agency.

Other speakers at the conference included shadow fire minister Lyn Brown who committed Labour to keeping the fire and rescue service in public hands, saying: "We will not let a critical public emergency resource pursue private profit over public safety and protection."

The conference began in fiery style with David Stockdale, a member of Tyne and Wear fire authority, calling Mordaunt's time as Westminster fire minister "an unmitigated disaster".

Despite having received the full Thomas review nearly a week before the fire conference, the DCLG refused to publish it beforehand.



FBU helps firefighter to win six-figure sum after injury

Compensation

A former firefighter who suffered a career-ending injury while working at Ilkley fire station in West Yorkshire has secured a substantial damages settlement.

Michael Hollings was seriously injured during a training exercise in May 2011. He and two colleagues were taking part in a drill that involved working at height when the 13.5metre ladder they were using cracked, causing them to fall to the ground.

Michael was wearing an "improvised chest harness" which held him to the ladder at the time of the accident. As it fell, the top of the ladder landed on a solid fence surrounding the training area, leaving Mr Hollings suspended six inches above the ground.

The force of the recoil as the ladder

impacted on the fence left him with a comminuted fracture, two dislocated elbows and forearms. His right foot was also fractured in the fall and he was left concussed.

Mr Hollings said: "Luckily, my FBU union representative came to talk to me after the accident and pointed me in the direction of Thompsons solicitors."

"I felt that, between the huge support I received from my family and friends and the backing of the FBU and Thompsons, I was in safe hands.

"My experience has shown me the true value of being a union member.

"Not only did the FBU fund my case so I had access to free, legal expertise but I also had on-the-ground support from people like my local FBU representative John Rankin."

Pride MP speaks at FBU school

FBU LGBT school

Swansea East Labour MP Sian James (*right*), whose journey into political activism was documented in the Bafta award-winning film *Pride*, was a guest speaker at this year's FBU lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) school which focused on campaigning and organising.

She spoke about how she first became politicised at a time when her Welsh mining community was being attacked by the Thatcher government.

The school also heard from Roy Goodspeed, who spoke about the role of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners group during the year-long dispute in 1984, as well as 2014 Mr Gay World, Stuart Hatton Jr, founder of the



anti-homophobia So What campaign.

Pat Carberry, LGBT committee secretary, said: "This LGBT school reminded us of what still needs to be accomplished and what now needs to be defended. Thirty

years on we remembered how the LGBT community joined with striking miners to support their cause.

"It was both inspirational and a great reminder of our role in fighting for workers' rights."

SOUNDING OFF

The right to protest

Hannah Dee, chair of Defend the Right to Protest, welcomes the FBU's assertion of everybody's right to protest at Westminster

Firefighters were right to protest outside Parliament in Westminster on 25 February – the ability to protest there is a civil right that has been under attack. Their spontaneous action defended not only their pensions, but the right to protest for all of us.

In 2005 MPs debated removing the "incredible annoyance and inconvenience" of Brian Haw – who camped outside Parliament in protest at the invasion of Iraq. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act which followed his protest outlawed "unauthorised" and spontaneous protest in a specified area. It failed to remove Brian Haw, but it hampered protest.

SOCPA was replaced in 2011 by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act which removed the need for permission to protest but granted the London mayor and police powers to prevent anything deemed "disruptive" in Parliament Square – including the use of loud hailers and "sleeping equipment".

This desire to prevent protests has led mayor Boris Johnson to buy water cannons at the same time as he has cut the number of fire engines.

The open area outside the Houses of Parliament was recently fenced off during recent Occupy movement protests against the "democratic deficit". Police dogs were deployed and over 40 arrests made.

These restrictions added to legislation such as the 1986 Public Order Act which was introduced after the 1984 miners' strike to criminalise dissent.

People falling foul of this law include a disability rights protester convicted for shouting at David Cameron as well as scores of students demonstrating against the tripling of tuition fees in 2010.

Defend the Right to Protest campaigns against such legislation and how the police use it.

➡ www.defendtherighttoprotest.org
@righttoprotest

PA PHOTOS



Mordaunt:
Ducked debate
and ignored
letters

Minister refuses to debate with FBU leader

Pensions dispute

Westminster fire minister Penny Mordaunt has ducked an invitation to debate the pensions dispute with FBU general secretary Matt Wrack.

She refused to appear on BBC Radio Solent, her local radio station, when the union confirmed it would participate.

The FBU has made three separate written requests to the minister for a

meeting to discuss the pensions dispute – all have been refused.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: “Firefighters will find it disgraceful that the minister is ducking the chance to have an honest conversation about these unworkable pension proposals.

“We have been labelled ‘militant’ by the government, but they are the ones refusing to talk to us and ignoring the concerns of firefighters.”



Wrack:
Minister's
refusal
disgraceful

PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



MPs agree with FBU on floods and cuts

Emergency response

A committee of MPs has agreed with the FBU that cuts to firefighter numbers could undermine future emergency responses to flooding.

The influential House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee used findings from the FBU's *Inundated: The lessons of recent flooding for the*

fire and rescue service report, published in February.

Its conclusions included: “With 6,500 fewer firefighters now than at the time of the 2007 floods, the UK today is less flood-resilient than it was just a few years ago, with an over-reliance on volunteers who for understandable reasons may not always be available.”



Thousands of people marched in London in a Time to Act on Climate Change demonstration to urge strong action from the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris this December. Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, spoke at the event.

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Nine in 10 emergency service staff affected by stress

Mental health

The mental health charity Mind has found that nearly nine in 10 (87 per cent) of emergency services staff and volunteers have experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point while working.

An online survey of more than 3,500 emergency services employees also revealed that more than half (55 per cent) had experienced mental health

problems at some point.

Despite the greater prevalence of mental health problems among emergency services personnel, Mind's research indicates that they are less likely to take time off sick as a result.

Only 43 per cent of emergency service workers and volunteers surveyed said they had taken time off work due to poor mental health

Matt Wrack, FBU general

secretary, said: “Firefighters and other emergency service staff deal with very challenging situations every single day.

“These may involve members of the public who are killed, injured or in danger in some way. This work therefore creates its own unique stresses and challenges.

“In addition, emergency service staff work 24 hours a day, meaning that they may face such challenges at any

time. It is well known that shift work creates its own risks for the health and wellbeing of workers.

“This situation is worsened as a result of a huge reduction in staffing levels across all emergency services. Recent years have seen the introduction of increasingly unsociable shift patterns while frontline staff try to deliver the service with fewer and fewer staff.”

❖ **Volunteers sought: p18**

The 'state of the art' system is so unreliable that any information we put in is double checked and scrutinised



Essex FBU members on the picket line

STEFANO CAGNONI

A disaster for families

As *Firefighter* went to press emergency fire control staff in Essex were on strike for nine days over radical changes to shift patterns that have forced some staff out of work due to 12-hour shifts severely disrupting their home life.

The shift changes come on top of a new mobilising system, launched earlier this year, which has suffered repeated technical faults, forcing control members to use pen and paper to record incident details.

Firefighter heard from just some of the control operators on how they have been affected ...

“ On my first day shift my husband will have to drop my two children off at a childminder for 18:30 in order for him to get to work. I won't be able to pick them up until 19:45 – that is as long as I leave on time and that there are no delays.

On my second day shift, because my husband doesn't finish until 09:00, I will have to get my children up at 05:00 in the morning get them ready for school, and drop them off at 06:00 so I can get to work for 07:00. Then again that evening they are dropped off at 18:30 and I can't pick them up until 19:45.

My young children are now having two late nights and one really early morning in order for me to go to work.”

“ I've got enough experience in my job to know that the new mobilising

system is not fit for purpose. Senior managers promised it would cut down on work by around 30% (one of the reasons for the job losses). All I've seen so far is the workload and stresses on staff increase by over 30%.

The 'state of the art' computer system is so unreliable that any information we put in is double checked and scrutinised before we are able to mobilise appliances with any confidence.

Control is made up of a group of professional, hardworking, knowledgeable and experienced people who are keeping things together through their sheer determination and dedication.”

“ Nobody expected a new mobilising system to go without teething problems, but we have been made to endure far more than that. Never in my career have I been scared to take a fire call – I am now. I have no faith in the system. As it stands the system is ineffective, slow, incomplete

Does it really need three engineers to work on the system because control operators aren't using it properly? I don't think so!

and dangerous. It is totally unacceptable.”

“ Since the new shifts have been imposed I have tried unsuccessfully to find childcare early in the morning. For me to get to work for 7am my husband has been taking time off from his job but this can't continue as he needs to leave for work at 6.30am. There is only so much his employer will take before this has to stop.

We have advertised for someone to help us from 06.30 to 08.30 but, due to the unsociable hours, the short period of time required and the rolling shift pattern no-one has replied. We have no family around us to help and the schools or nurseries around us don't offer us flexibility so early in the morning.”

“ The change in hours and shift pattern have been disastrous for myself and my family's life. I have been forced to job share and it has hit my family financially. It's an embarrassment when fire stations phone up because one thing or another isn't working or when the system crashes and we revert back to the 'old' system. It's also very frustrating that these errors and failures get blamed on user error when it clearly isn't ... does it really need three engineers to work on the system because control operators aren't using it properly? I don't think so!”



Blacklisting: a story of ruined lives

A new book documents the widespread use of blacklisting workers from employment as punishment for trade union activity.

Dave Smith, co-author of *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists*, found himself effectively barred from the construction industry for his trade union activities.

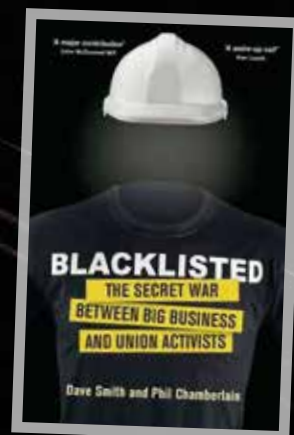
There have been suspicions that police were involved in the blacklisting of 3,200 construction workers, which came to light when the London offices of the Consulting Association were raided in 2009.

This company collated files on thousands of construction workers, as well as academics and journalists, and sold the information to 44 construction companies.

Many of these workers had their lives ruined as they were unable to find employment in the construction industry and were blacklisted for their trade union activities or for raising health and safety concerns.

A former police officer turned whistleblower, Peter Francis, has confirmed that he personally spied on trade unions while working undercover and has apologised for this.

❖ *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists* by Dave Smith and Phil Chamberlain was published in March 2015 by New Internationalist Publications; ISBN: 9781780262574.



Building an opening in the Crossrail tunnel in Canning Town, east London – the construction industry has been forced to confront and apologise for its blacklisting activities by a trade union campaign

CARL COURT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

March on Parliament brings Westminster to a standstill

Ministers run away from
challenge to make
pensions 'guarantee' real

Pinocchio, chickens and "liar liar pants on fire!". The FBU certainly made an impact in Westminster on 25 February. To coincide with a 24-hour strike, about 3,500 firefighters marched on Parliament, bringing Westminster to a standstill, to press the prime minister to act on the false "guarantee" given to firefighters and MPs during a parliamentary debate last year.

Westminster fire minister Penny Mordaunt told Parliament: "If someone fails a fitness test through no fault of their own and they do not qualify for ill-health retirement, they will get a redeployed role or an unreduced pension. That will be put on a statutory footing in the national framework – a full, unreduced pension, if

not an alternative role." This was a clear and undeniable pledge by the minister.

After the debate the FBU wrote to all fire authorities asking if they would implement the parliamentary guarantee. All the fire authorities to reply confirmed that they would not. London Fire Brigade even said that it had informed the minister of this before the debate.

The national employers at the Local Government Association also confirmed this position.

The minister knew before, during and after the debate that her "guarantee" was worthless. Firefighters simply could not accept this.

With a 24-hour strike already

❖ continued page 13







Matt Wrack and Alan McLean at the gates of Downing Street

FBU members in the packed rally at Central Hall, Westminster



Firefighters demanded the prime minister come out to see them. But he chickened out

❖ from page 10

announced at the FBU recall conference on pensions, it was decided that a rally and demonstration was needed to coincide with the day.

With just a week to go preparations were rapidly put in place. Press releases were written, journalists contacted and posters and leaflets sent out. Adverts were designed and placed in the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph* and London's *Evening Standard*.

On the day a number of members turned up dressed as Pinocchio to highlight the lies of the minister.

Chicken

One member even dressed up as a chicken – fittingly, given that the fire minister dodged a BBC radio debate with Matt Wrack on the same day.

With a capacity of 2,200, Methodist Central Hall opposite the Houses of Parliament was so packed that not everyone could make it inside. But firefighters and their supporters made it very clear why they had joined the protest.

Sick of the lies from the minister, FBU member Lucy May demanded honesty: “No more lies Penny Mordaunt. Don’t you lie to my children about their pension and my pension.”

Dave Baigent, a Cambridge city councillor and former firefighter, travelled to London to express his support and call upon David Cameron to honour the guarantee given to

firefighters in Parliament.

Travelling from Northern Ireland in solidarity with his brothers and sisters, David Nicholl said: “It is absolutely disgraceful that firefighters in England are having to go on strike for something that should be their right”.

Stuart Wilworth from Cornwall wanted to let Penny Mordaunt know how disgusted members felt that bare-faced lies were told in the Parliamentary debate.

After hearing from John McDonnell, Kate Hoey and Ian Lavery – MP members of the FBU parliamentary group, Matt Wrack called for an impromptu march on Parliament.

Joined at the head of the march by FBU president Alan McLean, the general secretary led thousands of firefighters out onto the road towards Parliament Square, halting traffic, before stopping outside the Houses of Parliament.

Megaphone

Megaphone in hand, Wrack called for David Cameron to come out and answer the questions of firefighters and to explain how the prime minister could find it acceptable for ministers to mislead Parliament.

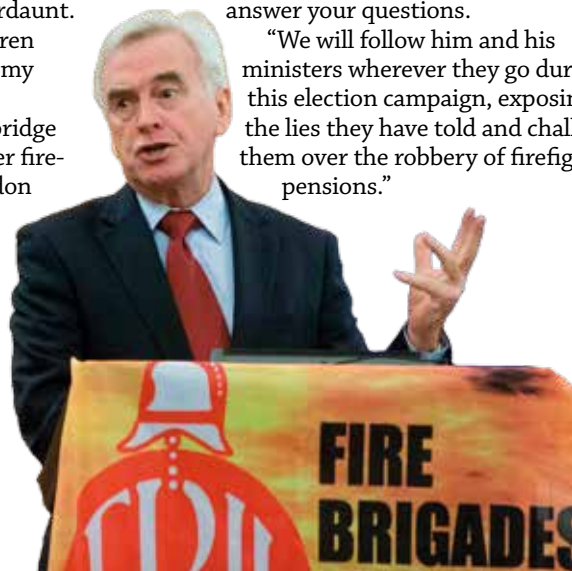
When no word came from the prime minister, the thousands-deep crowd decided to turn around and head toward his residence – 10 Downing Street.

Once there, firefighters surrounded the gates of Number 10 demanding that the prime minister come out and see them.

However, in the same way he was running scared of a leaders’ debate, he chickened out.

As FBU members prepared to travel home, Matt Wrack closed the protest saying: “David Cameron likes to be photographed with firefighters when it suits him, but he won’t come out and answer your questions.

“We will follow him and his ministers wherever they go during this election campaign, exposing the lies they have told and challenge them over the robbery of firefighters’ pensions.”



MP John McDonnell addresses the Westminster Hall rally

PICTURES: MARK THOMAS

GENERAL ELECTION 2015

Dave Green, FBU national officer, on the 2015 general election, the work of the FBU in Parliament and what it means for firefighters

The 2015 general election will decide who governs Britain in the years ahead. It is one of the tightest elections in living memory and its outcome will profoundly affect the fire and rescue service right across the UK.

Firefighters will rightly be thinking about how to vote. Politics matters, more so than ever before. Whatever we think of politicians, they decide life or death matters for firefighters.

Tory politicians and their Lib Dem allies decided to attack our pensions, our pay and our service.

It is the coalition government that has imposed austerity cuts and slashed the

fire and rescue service across the UK.

It is the coalition government that attacked our conditions of service.

It is the coalition government that has attacked our pensions and lied to Parliament whilst doing so.

It is the coalition government that has imposed pay cuts on firefighters and other public sector workers.

In this election there is a straightforward choice about who governs the UK. After 7 May the prime minister will either be David Cameron or Ed Miliband.

The government will be Conservative or Labour if enough votes are cast for either side. If not, it will be a Conservative-led coalition again or

a Labour-led coalition. Those are the choices at the top when all else is decided.

Many of us remember the disgraceful treatment of firefighters during the 2002-03 pay campaign by the Blair government. Many of us vowed never to associate ourselves with a Labour government ever again.

We do not give Labour a blank cheque in government. Labour has announced that it will stick to the Tory spending cuts for the next few years which is an absolute disaster. It will lead to even more misery and struggle for people in the UK. We need a government that

... continued page 17

THE FBU PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

The work of the FBU's parliamentary group has been crucial in developing links with MPs from all political parties. The group has grown in size since the last election and now consists of 34 members.

The group meets regularly in parliament, approximately every six to eight weeks while the House is sitting, so the union can brief MPs

on its current campaigns and discuss how they can best assist and raise these in Parliament. The union provides a written report to all group meetings and also provides regular updates at interim strategy meetings.

The parliamentary group is comprised of MPs who wish to work with the union and in the interests of its membership. Through

the general secretary and elected officials, the FBU sets the agenda of issues for the group to campaign and work on.

The aim of the group is ultimately to change the direction of government policy and build up a body of knowledge and understanding among MPs that can effectively hold the government to account and,

hopefully, influence the direction of policy formation.

The group's priorities have been to expose the damage to the service from the cuts – explaining their unfairness and impracticality – and the hardship faced by members because of the effective pay freeze and the changes to pensions, and to build opposition to all forms of privatisation.





Members should consider what this election means for their jobs and their fire and rescue service and vote accordingly

❖ from page 14

rejects austerity completely and invests properly in public services.

We must campaign like never before to convince Labour to abandon Tory spending limits.

However, the Labour Party led by Ed Miliband has shifted on a range of issues unimaginable under Tony Blair. The Labour leadership backed the FBU's pension campaign at the end of last year. They have argued at Westminster for a pensions offer in England at least as good as the deal won in Scotland and Wales. The FBU will need to hold them to this promise, but it is an improvement on the lying and evasion we've had from this government, with its false 'guarantee'.

This Labour Party has said it will

introduce a duty in England and Wales on the fire and rescue service to respond to flooding. This has been a longstanding demand by the FBU. The last Labour government did not implement it despite the advice of the Pitt review. But shadow fire minister Lyn Brown said last November that a Labour government would implement the duty. That is a victory for firefighters everywhere.

Labour has also announced nationally there will be no privatisation of the fire and rescue service. The coalition government tried to sneak through a change in the law to make this possible. If the Tories get in again they will try to force open the fire and rescue service to profiteers and spivs. That will devastate our service to the public and smash our hard-won conditions of service. It would be a disaster for the communities we

serve to see our fire and rescue service forced down the road of privatisation and presented on a plate for the millionaires and their hangers on to bleed dry.

Sticking to Tory spending limits means more austerity, more firefighter jobs cut and more stations closed. We cannot accept further pay cuts, or attacks on the service.

If a Labour government seeks to reorganise the fire and rescue service, it must put firefighters at the heart of those decisions. That means consulting with and listening to the FBU.

There is no doubt this election matters. Every FBU member will make up their own mind who to vote for, as is their democratic right.

I hope our members will consider what this election means for their jobs and their fire and rescue service.

OTHER PARTIES

TORIES

As the ruling party over the last five years, the Tories have:

- Imposed austerity cuts of 30% on the fire and rescue service
- Slashed more than 5,000 firefighter jobs
- Attacked firefighters' pensions – making firefighters pay more, work longer and get less
- Cut firefighters' pay
- Tried to privatise the fire and rescue service through mutualisation
- Used the Thomas review to attack firefighters' conditions of service.

The Tories have let their banker friends off the hook while making workers pay

for the economic crisis.

If the Tories are in government again, they plan to:

- Impose more austerity over the next five years
- Cut more firefighter jobs and close more fire stations
- Continue to freeze firefighters' pay
- Attack firefighters' conditions of service
- Open up the service to private contractors, mutuals and other profiteers
- Bring in police and crime commissioners to run the service
- Attack our right to take lawful industrial action

- Reduce health and safety laws that help protect firefighters at work

The Tories want to privatise the NHS and reduce public services, which will hit the communities we serve.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

The Lib Dems put the Tories in power in 2010 and have stuck with them all the way. They have backed government austerity cuts, pay freezes and were architects of the pensions attack. Most Lib Dem MPs voted in December for the government's new firefighters' pension scheme, despite promises made to firefighters. They cannot be trusted to stand up for firefighters and the

fire and rescue service at Westminster.

UKIP

UKIP is a Tory party with a dangerous message. It wants to sever our ties with Europe, the UK's biggest trading partner and market.

UKIP blames migrant workers for social problems caused by big business and the government.

It demonises black and ethnic minority people and wants to take us back to the stifling days of the 1950s.

Like Labour, it says it will stick to Tory spending cuts.

UKIP also wants to bring the private sector into the NHS.

UKIP never challenges bankers or business because it is funded by them.

MENTAL HEALTH

Help develop a charity training programme

Fear of being seen unfit to do the job can mean staff do not say they are struggling and do not seek the support they need

Emma Mamo, head of workplace wellbeing at the mental health



charity Mind, is seeking volunteers to help it develop its “blue light” programme to tackle mental health issues in the emergency services

More employers are recognising the importance of tackling the seemingly tricky issue of mental wellbeing at work.

Employers need to put as much time, energy and resources into mental health as they do any other health and safety issue. And they need to consider not only how they support staff with identified mental health problems, but also how they can improve and safeguard the wellbeing of the entire workforce.

Mental wellbeing is important in all workplaces, but it is arguably a more acute issue when jobs are emotionally demanding and employees experience and witness difficult situations – such as the emergency services.

Mind is about to start a new programme to support emergency – “blue light” – services staff and volunteers with their mental wellbeing.

We are already seeing the

scale of the unmet need: Mind’s survey of 3,500 emergency services personnel found that nearly nine in 10 staff and volunteers surveyed had experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point and were more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem than the general population.

But these staff were less likely to take time off sick or seek the support they needed.

Job insecurity

This is unsurprising. Exposure to trauma is bound to have an impact on mental wellbeing, but so too can changes to workload, organisational restructures and job insecurity.

Fear of being seen unfit to do the job can mean staff do not say they are struggling and do not seek the support they need.

We also know that there is an overlap between groups known to be at increased risk of developing mental health problems and emergency service staff and volunteers. While mental health problems affect men and women equally, men are less likely to ask for help. They are also more likely to take their own life.

Our plan for the programme is to focus on raising awareness; tackling stigma; providing information and support; and delivering training.

Much of this work will draw on work done in other workplaces through the Time to Change anti-stigma campaign that Mind runs with Rethink Mental Illness.

Employers are encouraged to sign the Blue Light Time to Change pledge which commits them to tackle stigma, improve mental wellbeing and to

develop a clear plan of how this will happen in their workplace.

Mind will be developing a training programme for blue light staff, managers and volunteers and will also provide information and support that staff can access to help them cope if they are struggling.

Involve staff

We want staff to be involved in shaping this programme and are looking for volunteers to help us review the information we are developing and the services we are designing so that we know it works for emergency service staff and volunteers.

If you would like to get involved in this or are interested in your organisation signing the pledge, please email us at bluelight@mind.org.uk. For more information visit www.mind.org.uk/bluelight



Mental wellbeing is important in all workplaces, but it is arguably a more acute issue when jobs are emotionally demanding and employees experience and witness difficult situations

Legal Beagle

Pensions and the law of the land

FBU
FREEPHONE
LEGAL ADVICE
0808 100 6061
IN SCOTLAND
0800 089 1331

Q How can the government change the firefighters' pension schemes or the Local Government Pension Scheme without the consent of scheme members?

A What does your contract say about your pension rights? Very little is the usual position. You should have been given a member's guide to the scheme when you started work and a typical engagement letter says the guide is the best source of knowledge about what the scheme provides.

Each authority publishes its own guide, but most of them use templates from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). For example, the guide to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) says: "This booklet is a brief guide to the Scheme. It summarises the main rules which apply at the date of writing ... but nothing it contains can override pensions legislation".

So the guide refers to the pensions legislation as the ultimate authority as to what the scheme provides. Change the legislation and you change the scheme.

Q Does the government need our consent for legislation it wants to pass?

A Look at it another way: a fire and rescue authority does not have the power to do whatever it wants. It must find a power somewhere in relevant legislation to justify what it wants to do.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act gives the DCLG the power to create firefighters' pension schemes and says fire and rescue authorities must participate. But fire and rescue authorities are not authorised to set up any other pension scheme.

That takes us back to the scheme rules – and they are made by legislation.

This is the way typical private sector pension schemes work: an employee's engagement letter refers to a guide, the guide refers to a trust deed and rules agreed between the employer and the trustees of the scheme. If the rules are changed by the employer and the trustees then the scheme is changed, whether or not the members agree.

Public sector pensions differ in one respect. A private sector scheme cannot be changed in a way that detrimentally affects the benefits that members have already built up.

This does not apply in public service schemes.

There is some protection. Schemes cannot be amended without consulting all interested parties (including the FBU) and they cannot be amended without parliamentary scrutiny. But, in most cases, scrutiny means nothing more than presenting draft regulations to Parliament and seeing if MPs object.

In the case of the new

firefighters' pension scheme, plenty of them did. That is why there was a full debate on the regulations when they were still in draft. But a majority government can always push through unpopular legislation.

The Public Service Pensions Act provides a little more protection for some features of public service schemes. Changes that would change the career

trade unions would have to consent to the change. In both cases the proposed changes would also have to be put to a vote in Parliament.

The government has committed to keeping the new firefighters' and local government schemes unchanged for the next 25 years, and that is also set out in the Act. But a government cannot tie the hands of a future one. An Act of Parliament can always be repealed.

European Union law does not extend to pensions except in some limited areas such as discrimination. But the European Court of Human Rights regards accrued pensions as "possessions" that the government cannot interfere with unless it strikes what the court accepts as a fair balance between the public interest and the private interests of the person who "owns" the pension.

How that balance would be struck if there was some pressing public interest in interfering with the pension rights that members have already earned would depend on what the government's reasons for needing to make changes were.

It is fair to assume that the present and future governments will not try to upset the structure and balance of the new schemes for 25 years.

But the government does not need every member to agree to a variation to their contract of employment.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

average benefit structure; the arrangements made for setting contributions (not the amount of the contributions – just the way they are set); or the way benefit levels are set require a higher level of consultation, in which the government would have to try to reach an agreement with trade unions. If a proposed amendment would have a significant, adverse, retrospective effect then the

Kirkcaldy's firefighters prove canny talent spotters

Firefighter Stevie McCrorie was off to London as we went to press – to take part in the final rounds of *The Voice* on BBC TV

Kirkcaldy firefighter Stevie McCrorie never expected his vocals to go viral on Twitter and Facebook. Or to have his shoulders massaged in front of millions by a singer who appears in *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

But that's what happened when the 29-year-old blue watch crew member performed a stunning "blind audition" on BBC talent show *The Voice* back in January. His treatment of Kodakly's *All I Want* went down a storm.

All four celebrity coaches "turned" – which means they were impressed enough to pitch to have Stevie on their team, where individual acts compete through knockout rounds in the hope of winning through to the final in early April.

Swooned

Coach, singer and actor Rita Ora, who appears fleetingly in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, was the first to turn. She was so overcome she swooned to the floor on learning Stevie was a firefighter.

Then, after making it clear she was very keen on his vocal style, the way he looked, the music – musical notation tattoos on his arms – his winning personality, his job ... Rita leapt from her seat to deliver a crowd-pleasing shoulder massage.

But she failed to win Stevie over. Though the audience was chanting "Rita, Rita, Rita" he chose instead to go with Kaiser Chiefs' front man

Ricky Wilson (below, with Stevie) – earning extra dollops of kudos and respect from viewers and tweeters.

Things have moved on since then. Stevie made it through to the "live" quarter finals, with his version of U2's *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*. As *Firefighter* went to press, he was off to London with 11 other acts to hone his performance and compete in live rounds, where the public will decide who stays and who goes. Only four acts will compete in the final event on 4 April.

Stevie certainly made a strong start. The 12-minute blind audition clip – the longest in the contest – had already notched up 1.7 million views and the 90-second BBC cut, 700,000. At this stage of the contest, he stood as the bookies' favourite to win at odds of 2/1.

It all sounds a bit overwhelming. But Stevie, from the small town of Alva in Clackmannanshire in the Scottish central lowlands, comes across as a grounded highly likeable family guy – and a firefighter and proud of it. His wife Amy runs a nail bar and their daughter, Bibi, is now two.

"It's been amazing so far," he told *Firefighter*, fresh from spending eight hours with *OK!* magazine, whose team arrived with suitcases of designer clothes for Stevie and Amy to choose from for an interview and photo-shoot.

But he's not getting swept away "into the clouds". For Stevie, being a firefighter helps keep things in perspective. "I was sweeping the





station floor before going out on a job after singing in front of huge crowds. And I've got a wife and child to care for which helps keep me grounded."

But there's no doubt Stevie has the ambition to make it as a "credible singer songwriter" – alongside his obvious talent as a singer. "I always try to stamp my mark on songs that I'm covering, but I want to get back to writing my own songs too."

Songwriter

He's been playing guitar and writing his own songs since he was 16 – and has performed in festival spaces set aside for unsigned acts, including on the T Break stage at T in the Park in Scotland and Radio One's BBC Introducing stage in Carlisle.

He's appeared as Stevie and the Moon and Mopp, collaborating with a friend and fellow songwriter.

There's a lot of Stevie's material from before *The Voice* out there on YouTube – and his take on Adele's *Someone Like You*, which wowed work colleagues. He only really started covering other people's hits after Bibi was born "to earn a bit of extra cash".

In fact, firefighting colleagues at Kirkcaldy have played a

Grounded – it was Stevie's work colleagues who entered him for The Voice – and he would like to get back to writing his own songs



Footage showing Stevie and colleagues at work was due to be screened in prime time as part of the live show's package

pivotal role in getting Stevie to that crucial blind audition.

They had seen his YouTube videos, heard him in local pubs and thought more people should hear just how well he could sing. So they entered him into the contest. "The guys at work knew I preferred the *The Voice* format to *X Factor*," said Stevie, who "loves the job and all the guys at the station".

So the Kirkcaldy firefighters have proved canny talent spotters – whatever the final brings. *The Voice* has given a clean-cut talented family guy from Alva the chance to showcase his considerable talents as a singer in front of millions – including record companies, music producers and people who book acts for festivals.

Vital role

It will give airtime to the vital role firefighters play in keeping people and buildings safe: footage showing Stevie and colleagues at work was due to be screened in prime time as part of the live show's package. It's a pleasing bit of public service product placement – which won't cost the taxpayer anything.

Firefighting, after all, is a crucial part of Scottish singer, songwriter and family guy Stevie McCrorie's story.

Prize quiz

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HOW TO ENTER

To win £100-worth of Kiehl's skin, hair and body care products, send your answers by 30 April on a postcard to: Prize Competition (April 2015), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



PA PHOTOS

1 Pharrell Williams and Robin Thicke were found liable for copyright infringement with the song *Blurred Lines* against whom?

- A – Brook Benton
B – Otis Redding
C – Marvin Gaye
D – Al Green

3 Madonna took a tumble at which awards ceremony?

- A – The Oscars
B – The Grammys
C – The Baftas
D – The Brit Awards

4 Which party won its first seat in the 2010 general election?

- A – UKIP
B – The Official Monster Raving Loony Party
C – The Green Party
D – Idle Toad



PA PHOTOS

2 Which film is said to have firefighters worrying about an increase in rescues from handcuffs?

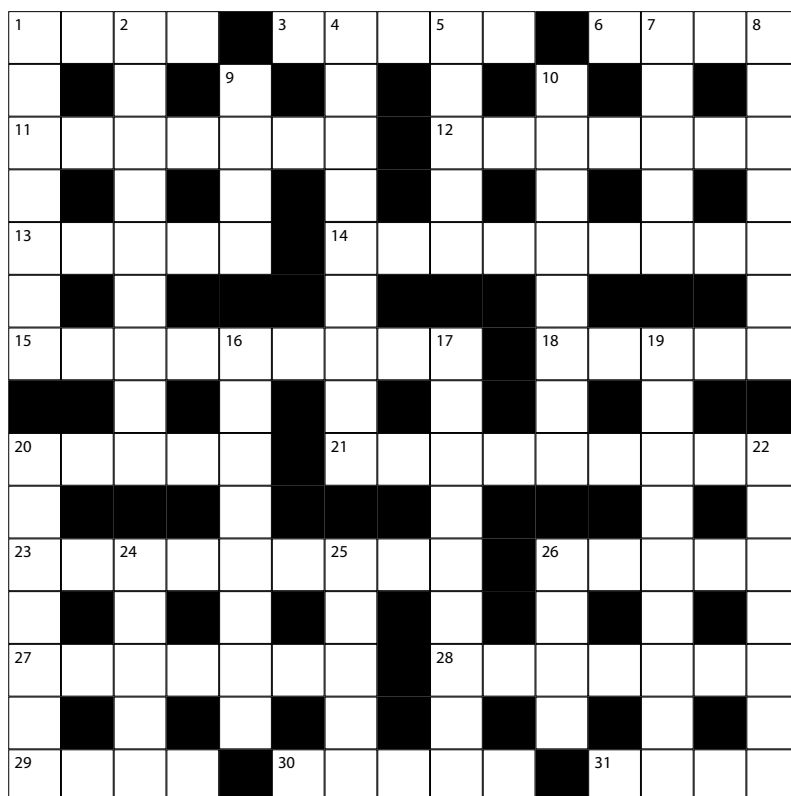
- A – Shaun the Sheep The Movie
B – Fifty Shades Of Grey
C – Spectre
D – The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

5 Who won the Australia leg of the 2014 Formula One race?

- A – Jenson Button
B – Nico Rosberg
C – Lewis Hamilton
D – Fernando Alonso



PA PHOTOS



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1** Not strong (4)
3 Place to keep tea, or carry clubs (5)
6 Decapod crustacean, with nippers! (4)
11 Such as 6, in a culinary sense (3-4)
12 Popular flavouring from orchid pods (7)
13 Cut of steak (1-4)
14 Major church (9)
15, 23 Essential kit – keeps the oxygen flowing (9, 9)
18 Robot aerial vehicle – or common bee? (5)
20 Joint between the humerus and the ulna – or just a great band (5)
21 Full of beans (9)
23 See 15 (9)
26 Patrol stealthily (5)
27 Essential kit for gaining height (runs in 9?) (7)
28 One attracted to or with great regard for another (7)
29 Powder, in short (4)
30 High bodily temperature (5)
31 Amount owed (4)

DOWN

- 1** Container for cleaning – person or clothing (4-3)
2 Depressed, in a tidal way (2,1,3,3)
4 Likely to cause dependency on (9)
5 'Continental quilt', as they used to say (5)
7 One who reigns – in a straight line? (5)
8 Touchy-feely writing system (7)
9 Essential kit: legwear that sometimes 27 (4)
10 The one expected to lose (8)
16 Prevented; beaten; outwitted (8)
17 Nasty fish disease – that turns colour into monochrome? (9)
19 Posh for privatised? (9)
20 Cloth on one's shoulder? (7)
22 The one who dunnit (7)
24 Provide motive power with the feet (5)
25 Experience on the tongue (5)
26 Essential kit – gets the water flowing (4)

Last issue's answers and winners



Crossword solution March

March quiz answers

- 1** – B 1936
2 – A Nevada
3 – A Michael Moorcock
4 – D Sam Peckinpah
5 – C The general election

Winners of January/February quiz

Steve Winter, Kent; Dave Parsons, Lincolnshire; Aaron Daubney, Lincolnshire; Dave Leen, Cleveland; Peter John, Neston; Ian Hunt, County Durham

Station Cat

Austerity – it all depends on who you are

Nice to do business with you. Then prime minister Tony Blair greets Nursultan Nazarbayev in Downing Street

ALASTAIR GRANT/PA IMAGES



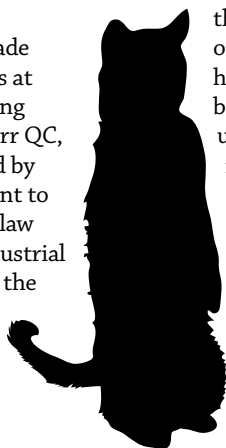
Curry and trips is recipe for austerity

 Hampshire's new chief fire officer, Dave Curry, is being chauffeured around from station to station by a fire-fighter, seconded from driving fire engines. Hampshire's contribution to austerity is a saving of £12 m. Unkind folk have suggested that, in these hard times, even a CFO might be expected to drive his own car.

Ron Dobson's secret service

 What on earth is wrong with Ron Dobson (*above*) this time? London's fire chief has made lurid allegations about the conduct of London FBU members who took strike action in 2010. The strike was caused by Dobson's decision to issue mass dismissal notices, to try to drive through shift changes. He claims the pickets were intimidating and occasionally violent. Your Cat prowled around the pickets on your behalf, and can report that the only violence she saw was when one of Dobson's strikebreaking drivers ran down a London FBU official with a fire engine.

Dobson made the allegations at a secret meeting with Bruce Carr QC, commissioned by the government to report on the law governing industrial disputes. And the oddest thing of all



WENDY HUTCHINSON/DEMOTIX/PA IMAGES

is that he met Carr despite the fact that his authority decided against helping Carr, because it suspected the purpose was to find an excuse to tighten the law on strikes.

As it turns out, Dobson wasted his time. Trade unions boycotted the review and FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "This review, a taxpayer-funded exercise on behalf of the Tory Party, is a series of smears against the entire UK trade union movement, just as we predicted it would be when it was first announced."

And the whole thing has run into the sand. Bruce Carr now says: "I have become increasingly concerned about the quantity and breadth of evidence that the review has been able to obtain from both employers and trade unions relevant to its terms of reference." He's produced what he calls a scaled-down report, with no recommendations.

Dobson might as well have stayed at his desk and tried to think of some useful work to do.

It beats cats up trees

 You'd have thought Dobson had better and more interesting things to do – your Cat hears that he's very worried about *Fifty Shades of Grey*. His brigade has issued a warning about the film. Apparently they think it's going to lead to hundreds of Londoners trapping themselves in handcuffs and having to be rescued by firefighters. Last year London firefighters released 28 people from "compromising" positions. In staid neighbouring Hertfordshire, they found only two.

Minister's new take on role-play

 There should be lots more women in the fire service, said fire minister Penny Mordaunt on International Women's Day. Then she saw the snag. A minister who is cutting the number of firefighters, and not allowing any recruitment at all, can sound a bit hypocritical if she says she wants more women appointed. But she carried on seamlessly, and shamelessly: "While I accept that most fire services in England are not currently recruiting fulltime staff I do believe there is an opportunity to attract and increase the number of female on-call fire-fighters by encouraging women to consider such roles."

Your Cat checked the figures: there are more than 1,000 fewer on-call firefighters than there were in 2010.

Top brass are so retiring these days

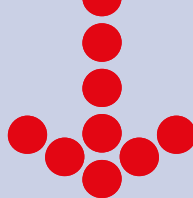
 In these austere times, I'm glad to be able to report someone doing well. In that spirit, your Cat can tell you that all three of Cambridgeshire FRS's senior fire officers are doing very nicely, thank you. They have all retired and been re-engaged by the force. Deputy chief fire officer Chris Strickland is the latest to secure the deal. Between them they earned a combined £500,000 last year, including pension contributions. It would be nice to report that they want their good fortune to be spread more widely, but sadly they appear to have given no support at all to the firefighters' pension campaign. A spokeswoman for the FRS said the issue was "irrelevant".

Blair gets rich as others die trying

 Just after Tony Blair signed a multi-million pound contract to help burnish the international image of Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev, the dictator's troops shot dead 15 oil workers who were striking because he hadn't paid their wages.

Azerbaijan, Burma, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi – they're all on Blair's client list. Your Cat owes these remarkable facts to a new book, *Blair Inc*, by Francis Beckett, David Hencke and Nick Kochan – and (full disclosure here) one of the three authors is very close to your Cat, and frequently purchases her alcoholic refreshment.

25-year badges



Pete Fosh (r), red watch, Bath, receives his 25-year badge from South West regional chair Kevin Herniman on the picket line



Glen Ryan (l), Swalwell station rep, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from FBU general secretary Matt Wrack



Eddie Harrison (l), divisional rep, Tyne and Wear, receives his 25-year badge from FBU general secretary Matt Wrack



Dave Doneo (l), blue watch, Chester, receives his 25-year badge from branch chair John West with watch colleagues looking on



Mick Curnick (c), Homerton, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Khaled Haider with colleagues looking on



Andrew Jenkins (l), green watch, Bridgend, South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Neil Byrne with watch colleagues looking on



Carly Yardley (l), green watch, Bridgend, South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Neil Byrne with watch colleagues looking on



Gordon Thomas (l), white watch, Bridgend, South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Neil Byrne with watch colleagues looking on



Tim Hughes (l), RDS, Bridgend, South Wales, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Neil Byrne with colleagues looking on



Alan Heaps (r), day staff, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from officers' rep Ned Phelan



Alex Flynn (l), white watch, Bootle, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from officers, rep Ned Phelan



Philip Horsley (l), green watch Lambeth river crew, London, receives his 25-year badge from London EC member Ian Leahair



Kevin Connolly (l), green watch, Lambeth river crew, London, receives his 25-year badge from London EC member Ian Leahair

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any
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changes to next of kin or nominations
for benefits.

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0800 089 1331

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personal injury, family law,
wills, conveyancing, personal
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For disciplinary and
employment-related queries
contact your local FBU
representative.

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it was taken.