



Volume 30 No. 2 March 2002

FIRE FIGHTER

**Michael
Nicholas –
the first ever
FBU Executive
Council
Member for
Black &
Ethnic
Minority
Members –
was elected
18 March
2002**

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First Executive Council Member for Black & Ethnic Minority Members

MICHAEL Nicholas was elected as the first ever Executive Council Member for Black & Ethnic Minority Members on 18 March 2002.

Brother Nicholas is a Firefighter in London and has been an active Union Official for the past eight years.

He has been a Branch Chair and Secretary; Group Chair & Secretary of the London B&EMM Committee; a member of the National Black & Ethnic Minority Members Committee; a member of the Education Sub Committee; Treasurer & Membership Secretary for B&EMM Committee and a delegate to the TUC Black Workers Conference.

Congratulations go to Michael on this historic election of the first ever Executive Council Member to represent Black & Ethnic Minority Members within the Union.

GENERAL SECRETARY

Time to revisit our Fire Service Pay Formula

AT LAST year's FBU Annual Conference and throughout the last two or three years it has become evident that members are feeling it is time to revisit our Fire Service Pay Formula. This formula was won after a nine week long strike over a cold winter in 1977. This was the first time – and to date remains the only time – that there has been a national strike in the UK fire service. We want to keep it this way.

Over the last 20 years this formula has served us very well. Real wages for firefighters and fire control operators have improved steadily in line with those of skilled manual workers in the private sector. This redressed the imbalance prior to 1977 when we were amongst the lowest paid workers. In recent years however occupational change in the workplace and the labour market has accelerated dramatically and also firefighters and fire control operator's responsibilities have broadened considerably. In the fire service more emphasis is now placed on fire prevention and community liaison. The demands of the job have become increasingly technical and complex both in front line fire fighting and in fire control rooms.

In short the old formula based on comparisons with industrial manual workers no longer fits the bill. Also the issue of the current level of pay needs addressing.

We believe that all sides in the fire service recognise the value of having a pay formula. Nevertheless if we are to recruit and retain quality staff particularly in periods of relatively full employment in many parts of Britain then the formula must reflect modern realities. I was pleased to see that the CACFOA President Richard Bull, writing in the December issue of *Fire* magazine, also supports reviewing the formula. He acknowledges that

"The weekly pay levels of a firefighter today certainly do not bear comparison with those of a police constable (without



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**The true value of the job which
firefighters and fire control
operators are doing now must be
reflected in an improved level of
pay – not tomorrow but today**

overtime) or, indeed, other skilled workers”

He continues,

“... as we move even more into the agenda of community safety as our primary focus, we will expect our firefighters to be adaptable and flexible, whilst also possessing high levels of interpersonal skills as well as continuing to react to fire and other emergencies.”

I am pleased to see CACFOA thinking along the same lines as the FBU!

We will make the case for change. September 11th has reminded the public of the contribution firefighters and fire control operators make to society. We have been praised time and

time again by the watchdog of public services, the Audit Commission, for our standards of service. Here then is the crucial point. Our employers will use our claim for improving the pay formula as an opportunity to try to enforce the changes in our working conditions which they have sought for some time. We will mount an effective campaign making the case for **positive** change in the Service – as frontline emergency service workers we are best placed to determine what is positive, effective change – to deliver a high quality service to the public. The focus must be that the modernising of the Service should be just that – bringing it into the 21st century world of work – not an excuse to undermine the Union and our terms and conditions of employment. The true value of the job which firefighters and fire control operators are doing now must be reflected in an improved level of pay – not tomorrow but today.

My aim when I was elected as General Secretary of the FBU was to marry our proud past with a bold future. In order to do this we have carried out a widespread review of the structure of the FBU and how efficiently or otherwise it functions. The proposals which will be put to Annual Conference this year are intended to standardise and professionalise our campaigning work – work which we will be doing to improve your wages and conditions of service.

I am proud to be an official of the Fire Brigades Union. We are held in high regard throughout the trade union and the labour movement and in the minds of the general public. We are seen as a bold Union prepared to stand up for what we believe in – not just for ourselves but for the public, for other workers nationally and internationally. It's easy to say to officials “go away and get our pay formula improved”, but every single member needs to be aware of the implications. We want a joint approach to change in partnership with our Employers. We do not seek confrontation. However if members mandate us to improve the pay formula you must appreciate that this places certain responsibilities on your shoulders. Your national officials, your Executive Council will show leadership, this is our job, BUT there is no point in showing leadership if we look over our shoulder and see there are no troops behind us. To put it bluntly if you send us out to do a task you need to be there shoulder to shoulder with us in order to accomplish it.

We have had to spend a lot of time and effort over the past twenty years defending our Service, our wages and conditions. Let's make 2002 the year in which we begin to advance.

ANDY GILCHRIST
General Secretary



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FAIRNESS AT WORK is about treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves – with respect

PAY

Pay: What our last conference agreed

THE following is the Statement which was passed by Annual Conference last year.

There has been, to date, only one National Strike in the UK Fire Service. It was a highly significant event in our Union's history both politically and industrially. Of the many outcomes from this National Strike, the Fire Service Pay Formula is amongst the most significant.

The benefits of the formula are two-fold:

Firstly it is important to realise that "free collective bargaining" does not exist in the public sector. Successive Governments use public sector pay as an economic "regulator" in respect of controlling spending and thus influencing inflation and growth.

The existence of the pay formula means that we do not have to engage in a public battle over pay on an annual basis, which would have a negative effect on both membership morale and public support.

Secondly, the formula has ensured that FBU members have, for the most part, fared better financially than other local government manual workers and rises have been above the increase in the Retail Price Index for all but two years since 1979.

Though the formula has somewhat lagged behind the rise in average earnings it has generally produced better increases in pay than collective bargaining in other sectors certainly up to 1996.

The formula is distinct from other pay systems in that:

- We are linked to a specific LEVEL of earnings rather than the annual movement in earnings.
- The formula applies to members' earnings rather than basic pay.

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Retained Firefighter
£6.20 an hour

Fully Qualified Firefighter
£21,500 a year

Emergency Fire Control Operator
£19,800 a year

**IS THIS
REALLY ALL
YOU ARE
WORTH?**

Support the FBU campaign for more pay for all Fire Service workers

5th COLUMN

- We take the figure in April, which reflects the growth in earnings of the upper quartile of male manual workers over the preceding 12 months. This is updated by using the average earnings figure in the whole economy for August and the upper quartile is then projected to November. New pay rates are set in November. The increase is therefore based on movements in earnings, which took place up to 19 months earlier.

In a sense our annual increase is almost “retrospective”.

Our relatively “small” increases in recent years are the result of the low growth in male manual earnings, which causes the male manual upper quartile figure to lag behind the average earnings index.

The fact that the formula links the change in the quartile to FBU members’ earnings rather than basic pay has also had a somewhat “negative” impact on FBU members’ pay. It is important to understand that individual elements of the formula can have a detrimental effect on the calculation if they have moved significantly in either direction.

Historically the formula has served us well. There is however a growing feeling among members that the increasingly skilled

The Fire Brigades Union is one of the very few Unions to have come out of the last 20 years with a national agreement on terms and conditions and also pay, intact

nature of both firefighters and emergency fire control operators’ jobs coupled with an increasing workload and decreasing levels of staff should be reflected in their pay packets.

The Parliamentary under Secretary of State for the Fire Service, Mike O’Brien, has set out his vision for a modern day Fire Service. The FBU shares his commitment to prevention through education and to maintaining ever-higher standards of service.

Such significant changes will only be achieved by a highly skilled, trained and motivated workforce. One such significant change is the transition towards Community Fire Safety, which increasingly requires new and additional skills of our membership. It is therefore fair to expect that these major changes be rewarded in respect of improved pay.

Obviously in seeking to negotiate improvements in pay, we must also be aware that success may be a protracted and complex process. If we pursue changing the formula our Employers will certainly insist on something in return.

Whatever the comparator, it is unlikely that it can guarantee sizeable year on year improvements. Nor should we see pay in isolation from other conditions of employment and working practices or FBU policies e.g. the pre-arranged overtime ban which has created jobs in the Service.

However this does not mean we should not have the debate – but it must be a mature debate.

IN LINE WITH OTHER WORKERS ?

In 1978 a Member of Parliament earned £6,897 plus allowances. That figure today stands at £51,822 plus allowances! Nice work if you can get it, and let’s not forget that most MPs have one or more ‘proper’ jobs outside of what they were elected to do.

A Qualified Firefighter (subject to a minimum of four years training) in 1978, earned £4,606 with no allowances. 24 years later that figure stands at £21,531 with no allowances.

So, let’s work this out then. In 1978 a Firefighter earned roughly two thirds of an MP’s salary. If an MP’s pay increases had kept in line with a Firefighter’s their pay today would be approximately £32,250. On the other hand, if a Firefighter’s pay increases had kept in line with an MP, our pay today would be approximately £34,548.

Doesn’t really make sense or add up in this era of public sector bashing does it? I always thought MPs were public sector!

Write to THE FIFTH COLUMN, c/o The Editor, The Firefighter, Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE

The Fire Brigades Union is one of the very few Unions to have come out of the last 20 years with a national agreement on terms and conditions and also pay, intact. This is quite an achievement. If members vote for change then they must be quite clear about the consequences of this choice.

We must understand that this means making a commitment to seeing the thing through and making tough choices.

On this basis the Executive Council recommends to Conference that, in light of recent innovations and policy developments in the UK Fire Service the Executive Council be tasked with investigating and reporting on:

1. The change in the Firefighter and Control Staff roles.
2. The clear potential for further change in these roles.
3. The need to better reflect in a future pay formula these changes in respect of overall terms and conditions, in relation to appropriate comparators.

The Executive Council further recommends that this report will be made no later than Annual Conference 2002.

The Executive Council gives a commitment that should the conclusion of this work require action or decision before the Annual Conference of 2002, then a Recall Conference will be convened.

1977 STRIKE SILVER ANNIVERSARY

We were naive , inexperienced – but members' backing made us believe our fight was just

Matty Melia
OOT Member (ex Stn.O C3 Canning Place, Liverpool)

YES, later this year we will be celebrating the silver anniversary of our national strike.

I have heard many varying tales over the years as to how industrial relations at the time culminated in us withdrawing our labour. Well, the following information is, to the best of my memory, correct with the obvious exceptions as to exact dates and the straying of chronological order.

By April 1977 I had served as an operational firefighter at Banks Road (Garston, Merseyside) fire station for just over six years, still wet behind the ears, as the old hands would say. I had been Branch Chair for a short while, sitting alongside the legendary Baz (Graham) Moore, our Branch Secretary.

About the second or third week of April, a Branch meeting was called and during proceedings a namesake of mine, Chris Melia (Sub O) proposed an emergency calls only dispute, as rumours had already commenced that the proverbial three half crowns were already on the table for November!

The proposal was carried unanimously by a well attended Branch meeting (large Branch at that time, two pumps and three airport annex appliances) and taken to the next divisional meeting.

The division passed the resolution and it then proceeded to

Brigade level. At this juncture there became an impasse. Terry Fields, our Brigade FBU Secretary and future MP, although agreeing with our discontent and fear of the imposition of the three half crowns, believed we would do better staying under the umbrella of the FBU.

The majority of the Brigade Committee were in favour of the emergency calls only resolution, but realised there would be no official sanction of the action. A hastily organised meeting was arranged (by George Kelly) at the Denbigh Castle public house in Liverpool for the formation of the unofficial Committee.

The first meeting of this Committee was well attended, with nearly all stations (31 wholetime, if memory serves well) represented. The only non-attendees were Western Division. It should be explained here that certain areas of the Brigade were of a different culture and would not ever be of an industrial action frame of mind (and that is and always will be their right).

During the meeting Bob Roxburgh (Roxy), Central Div, Charlie Leeman, North Div, Brian Morris, East Div and myself, along with Roger Carter (colleague at S5 and a brilliant aide during this dispute), were elected onto the Committee. Various resolutions were passed, the main one being that the emergency calls only would continue until a satisfactory pay award was received.

It must be emphasised at this point that no one involved during this dispute had any political aspirations and our sole aim was a considerable increase in wages, to take firefighters and their

Firefighters picket London Fire Brigade headquarters as staff come out on strike in 1977



families out of the poverty trap. Some of our colleagues working a 48 hour week (only recently reduced from 56) were entitled to Family Income Supplement, rent and rate relief and were claiming free school meals and uniforms for their children!

The emergency calls only, continued into the June with few problems, the exceptions being the cloth heads who believed the unofficial action gave them a licence to do as they wished. These hiccups were resolved by common sense discussions between OICs and members of the Committee.

Towards the end of June, Roxy, Charlie and myself were called to a meeting at Hatton Garden (HQ) with Terry Fields and Harry Coggins (FBU Brigade Chair?)

The gist of this meeting (although I believe it will be greatly disputed), was that if the emergency calls only action was called off, then Terry Fields would lead Merseyside in a dispute if National Conference failed to call a national strike in the November. This and a few other things on the table (which appeared to us as a possible compromise to the situation), were discussed by all the station delegates and rejected out of hand, along with a good rollicking for us three for even considering the offer!

27th JUNE pm

Things had remained quiet for a few days when I received a call at home. An ally in the personnel department had seen dismissal notices ready to be issued the next day! (On the 48 hour duty system, the 56 hour system with a day and a night off every three weeks. Yes, it was my day off the next day). I obviously contacted all the Committee and as many stations reps as possible that night, to inform them of the impending dismissals.

28th JUNE

At eight the next morning, I met Roxy and Charlie at Strand Road fire station. The senior officers on duty would not allow any of us on to the station and we were getting reports (via a coin box phone commandeered by the Committee) that firefighters had been sacked at Crosby.

The same ritual was taking place throughout the county. Men

were asked to sign a document agreeing to return to normal duties and collect a mop and bucket when leaving the office or be sacked. The same scenario took place at Strand Road, with the management ploy of confronting the youngest members of the watch first. Initially the pressure was too much for the 'sproggs' but, I believe, after the third mop and bucket had been accepted, they were returned en masse and the whole station walked out on strike!

I returned to Banks Road to get my dismissal papers only to be told that I could not be sacked as I was on my extra rota! At the same station, Bob Gardener (a veteran of the D Day landings) was sacked by a senior officer who had joined the Brigade on the same day.

Shortly after, I picked up Roxy and Charlie. Joined by the rest of the initial strikers we moved in convoy to every station in the Brigade, right through past midnight, with the biggest flying picket in living memory, successfully bringing the Brigade to a stop. All three of us were wrecked and headed home to prepare for the battle ahead!

29th JUNE

The next morning the three of us were amongst the throng assembled at Strand Road awaiting developments. Suddenly we appeared to out rank the senior officers, it was us that were being approached by them; offered cups of tea, the use of the phone and anything else we wanted.

Suddenly, a phone call from the head of Merseyside County Council, Sir Kenneth Thompson, he spoke to Roxy. We would lose no pay or pension rights if we would return to duty immediately and we would come off our emergency calls only dispute on the following Monday, 4th July, Independence Day!

The unofficial Committee remained in existence, awaiting the outcome of National Conference, mandated to strike if no support was forthcoming from the Union hierarchy.

I went to Conference, at Eastbourne, accompanied by the Sherburn Brothers and Rod Hatton, instructed to immediately contact my Brigade to implement strike action if a no vote came

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PAPHOTOS



1977 STRIKE

Members' backing made us believe our fight was just

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

from the Conference hall.

It was here that I had my 15 minutes of fame, asked by the local lads from Eastbourne fire station to give an interview to Southern TV (broadcast nationally on ITV News). The atmosphere was heightened by the impromptu full PDA to the Conference hall, requested by whom?

Probably because nobody ever dreamt firefighters would go on strike, I was given a fair amount of air time by the interviewer. I pointed out to her the shortcomings of our paltry wages and how unimportant we were to members of the public, members of industry and Members of Parliament unless their backsides were on fire! I also brought to her attention the death of two firefighters at a Reading paint warehouse, which had been relegated in the news by Victor the giraffe who could not get to his feet!

The rest is history, due to the ferocity of Conference, Mr. Parry, the General Secretary, was taken ill, soon to be replaced by Ken Cameron. Conference voted to strike from 14th November (a seven day breathing space, which I believe cost us an immediate victory) and a pay formula that did not make us millionaires, but did keep our heads well above water without the need for a return to another national dispute.

There are not many "strikers" left in the service, obviously outnumbered by younger post-strike firefighters, but it is these younger Union members who must continue to carry the baton of hard fought victories in both pay and conditions. You will need eyes in the back of your head. I have heard rumours that the Government are considering dropping the pay formula to give firefighters a better deal, they believe you are under-paid! (Another piece of Labour spin?) They are ready to screw the police and if they get away with that, they will get away with anything.

Sadly, both Roxy and Charlie are no longer with us, but I would like to thank all those lads in Merseyside Fire Brigade who supported the three of us in our fight against the establishment in our efforts to improve our pay. The three of us were totally naïve and inexperienced, but your backing certainly made us believe our fight was just.

For the benefit of the readers of this article, I am well aware that other Brigades in 1977 had commenced actions prior to the 'National Dispute', especially Strathclyde.

The main reason for my article is that brave actions of the rank and file of Merseyside and the rest of the country should not be forgotten!

A final thank you goes out to the crews of Eastbourne fire station for their hospitality after the 1977 Conference, before our long drive home.

Unity is Strength – support your Officials, without them you have lost!

Our members deserve the best equipment and the safest procedures that are available



Mick Shaw
Executive Council
Member, London; and
Convenor of FBU
Breathing Apparatus
and Personal Protective
Equipment Sub
Committee

THE Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (who have taken over responsibility for the Fire Service from the Home Office) have established a project team to review Technical Bulletin (TB)1/97 (the advice previously published by the Home Office on the use of Breathing Apparatus).

The FBU is represented on the project team by National Officer Dave Patton, assisted by members of the Union's Breathing Apparatus and Personal Protective Equipment (BA and PPE) Sub Committee.

It is essential for the safety of our members that they are provided with proper equipment and safe working procedures. Too many members of this Union have lost their lives at incidents due to unsafe working practices – we have to ensure that no more lives are lost.

The BA and PPE Sub Committee have drawn up a list of amendments that they would wish to see made to the Technical Bulletin and issues that they feel need to be discussed. They include:

BREATHING APPARATUS PROCEDURES



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Firefighters in breathing apparatus rescue the victim of a house fire from the first floor bedroom

- Opposition to twin cylinder sets with dual valves – only single valve configurations should be used. Twin cylinder sets only acceptable if lightweight cylinders used;
- The removal of the Rapid Deployment procedure;
- Emergency Teams should be available at all times when BA is used and the Team should be the same size as the BA crew that has been committed;
- What has happened to the earlier trials with new BA guidelines? Is attaching to bits of string the safest way of working with the various technologies that are available today?
- BA to be worn at all times when there is a threat to the health of our members;
- Optimum size of BA crews – should be crews of three;
- The appropriate rank for a BA crew leader;
- Background noise interfering with evacuation signals;
- DSUs being confused with other warning signals;
- Duration tables to be revised to include all sizes of cylinders in use;
- BA communications should be provided to all wearers on all occasions;
- Retractable “dog-lead” style personal lines;
- All radio communications equipment to be intrinsically safe;
- Air-line procedures – BA set must be left on whilst in use;

- TB 1/93 on Bridgehead Procedures needs to be reviewed;
- Emergency air supplies for Chemical Protection Suit wearers;
- Wearing of BA in confined spaces.

It is to be hoped that the project team will conclude its work in a shorter timescale than we have sometimes experienced with similar reviews conducted at Home Office level. Our members deserve the best equipment and the safest procedures that are available and they must be adhered to by everybody involved.

The ability to be able to do our job safely and effectively is something that needs to be taken seriously by all members. Any member with any comments or suggestions on BA equipment and procedures can forward them to the Union's BA and PPE Sub Committee via their Brigade and Regional officials.

The ability to be able to do our job safely and effectively is something that needs to be taken seriously by all members



PHOTOLINE

Mum and Dad, what did you do to stop the war?

Tony Maguire
Regional Secretary, Region 2 Northern Ireland

ON JANUARY 12th 2002, Dan McColgan, a postal worker and member of the Communications Workers Union, was coldly shot to death whilst arriving for work at a north Belfast sorting office.

The immediate impact of this cowardly murder was that a number of lives were devastated. Danny McColgan left behind a young partner and infant child. If the killers who took away that child's father and provider operated to previous form, they would have used a tried and trusted modus operandi. They would have deployed an experienced killer to provide leadership and a steadying hand to the operation, and a new and unblooded volunteer, to test his or her commitment to the cause, by delivering the coup de grace to the victim, albeit with a trembling hand and unsteady aim.

As a direct consequence of this killing, the McColgans were not the only people devastated. If a new "volunteer" earned his spurs on that dreadful mission, he also sold his life and soul to the cowards and gangsters who have usurped the democratic voice of all of the Northern Irish people.

There are countless testimonies from our young people, once fired with idealism and patriotic duty, who hurtled headlong into the path defined for them by their cultural identities, only to find out, sometimes very brutally, that violence and murder also destroy the patriot!

To our eternal shame murders such as McColgan's have not been unusual in our society. Our history over centuries has been littered with the murders of thousands of workers, the names of many of them forgotten, except by those who knew and loved them. But every now and then there have been moments of definition and clarity. McColgan's shooting was one of those moments, just as when the Shankill was bombed, when the Rising Sun Bar was attacked, the Poppy Day massacre at Enniskillen or when Omagh was desecrated, our people shook themselves out of collective fear and publicly said "enough!"

The dreadful slaughter of this 20 year old was set against a backdrop of escalating sectarian tensions in north Belfast. Arising out of a dispute over means of access to a primary school, a Loyalist paramilitary organisation issued death threats to teachers and school workers in the immediate area. In a terrifying spiral of fear and tension, Republican paramilitaries made similar threats to distribution workers in Mallusk and workers at the Montupet factory in Dunmurry.

The CWU stopped work in protest at the murder of their member, stating that they would not return until ALL death threats had been lifted.

It was not by coincidence that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions mobilised affiliated Unions to enjoin in a day of protest, the theme of which was to be "Violence doesn't work – Sectarianism is Evil". The root of this strategy lay in 2001, when Gavin Brett, a Protestant teenager was mindlessly murdered by

NORTHERN IRELAND

paramilitaries in yet another farcical case of mistaken identity. Congress took a deliberate and conscious decision then, to initiate a proactive long-term strategy designed to combat sectarianism in our community, centering on north Belfast. To reflect and give focus to the revulsion felt by many at the latest murder, Congress called for a one-hour stoppage of work on Friday 18th January, and for workers to attend mass demonstrations in Belfast, Cookstown, Londonderry, Omagh, Enniskillen, Newry and Magherafelt.

The leadership of the FBU in N. Ireland did not hesitate in giving full support to Congress's call for action, however this time we felt that there was a real and urgent need to do something more than turn out to a demonstration. A point had to be made and so we went public with our position. FBU members were called upon to embark on "emergency calls only" action and to protest in a quiet and dignified manner outside Brigade Headquarters and fire stations across the Brigade.

On the coldest, and by far the wettest day in a long time, our members responded in FBU style, and our only regret is that we did not have a banner to display at each of the demonstration locations!

From a freezing cold and brutally wet platform at Belfast City Hall, Assistant General Secretary of ICTU, Peter Bunting told a crowd of 30,000 that we were here "To demonstrate our revulsion and abhorrence of all murders in Northern Ireland over the past thirty two years."

He went on to say that "It would appear that the evil purveyors of bigotry have declared war on the young. Fomenting hatred among our youth is designed to ensure the continuity of hatred, a hatred which thrives in all communities and contributes to anti social behaviour illustrated in the all too well documented attacks on public sector workers such as fire and ambulance crews, public transport workers, both bus and rail, the providers of Accident and Emergency hospital services and civil servants in public offices".

To cheering and applause Peter Bunting called upon all paramilitary groups to dissolve and by doing so "ensure the protection of the right of workers to go about their daily lives earning a living free from intimidation, threats of murder and crass bigotry"

At all of the protest locations workers were asked to adopt the affirmation that:

"We, the citizens of Northern Ireland, by our presence here today affirm our total opposition to all sectarian activity of whatever nature. No one has the right to engage in this activity or claim it to be on the behalf of any section of our society or in defence of its rights.

Our purpose in being here today is to illustrate our revulsion at any form of bigotry or sectarianism which has led to murder, violence or acts of intimidation. We have suffered from these evil characteristics for more than three decades now.

Therefore we call on all those engaged in acts of sectarianism or paramilitary activity to stop. In particular we call on paramilitary organisations to disband now. The end of sectarianism combined with the dissolution of paramilitary organisations will allow us to pursue the goals of an equal, peaceful society linked to prosperity and jobs wherein dignity and respect are shown to all and shared by all, irrespective of political or religious differences."

Tens of thousands of people took part in the demonstrations across the province, and in doing so indicated to the cowards and bullies who have dominated our lives for so long, that we have had enough.

It's time to listen to the people and recognise that their way of doing things has had its day. It's over!

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland understands and recognises the depth and scale of the political and socio-economic difficulties facing our society. Doing something about those problems is something different than sitting on comfort-

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Above: The FBU banner at the Belfast rally (top left)

NORTHERN IRELAND

What did you do to stop the war?

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

able backsides hoping that someone else will sort the mess out. The people who turned out to demonstrate actively decided that they would do something to make a difference. We do not know just now how significant that difference might be, but it is a fact that the paramilitary death threats were rescinded on the morning of the protest!

Northern Ireland, and in particular north Belfast returned to an uneasy existence, but tragically, on 11th February a civilian worker at a military installation in Co. Londonderry was terribly mutilated by a booby trap bomb. The scum who made this indiscriminate attack on workers with a booby trap, are just as gutless as those who shot dead an unarmed postal worker!

The man has lost both arms and is critically ill at time of writing. Once again cowards and bullies have ruined lives, regardless of the democratically expressed wishes of the majority of our people.

The cynic might say that this outrage illustrates the ineffectiveness of our protest. As political activists we cannot accept this. To the cynic we say, if we do nothing then we will surely fail, but if we do something, then we just might win! This must be our strategy. We must never give up trying!

Congress has furthered its commitment to combat sectarianism recently by raising monies from affiliated Unions, including the FBU, to fund an initiative to undertake some proactive work in the most socially deprived and neglected areas of North Belfast. The amount raised will be matched by the Irish and US Governments, to provide training intended to equip people in such areas with basic bargaining skills, negotiating techniques and conflict resolution skills. It is initiatives such as this that just might make the difference needed in our community.

It must be accepted by all of those hoping for a positive future, that one result of the political and cultural change occurring in Northern Ireland has been the evolution of frightened and worried sections of our community, who have been left without leadership, without direction and without political focus. There are elements in our society, who, having witnessed political violence at first hand, now believe in a simplistic and uncomplicated way, that violence achieves results.

Socialists have accepted that a society based on equality, fairness and tolerance is the only way forward. The newly disaffected in our society must understand that they have nothing to fear from such principles! Unless they do, we will see more lives, talents, opportunities and families destroyed by violence and murder. The solutions to our difficulties, in the main, lie with us. We must make the peace process work or accept the legacy of its failure, which undoubtedly will be more of the same old thing, for generations to come.

The Fire Brigades Union, along with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions is doing its bit.

What are you doing?

TUC NEWS

Asthma costing billions

EMPLOYERS are paying out billions in lost staff, lower productivity and high compensation payouts because they are failing to substitute asthma-causing substances in their workplaces, according to a TUC report in *Risks*, the TUC's online health and safety bulletin.

In particular, the NHS is squandering tens of millions of pounds to replace skilled nurses and other staff, and compensating the victims because of continued use of the disinfectant glutaraldehyde, and of high protein and powdered latex gloves, when alternatives are available. Over the economy as a whole, asthma could be costing £3 billion over the next decade, according to the TUC.

In *Risks* recently TUC General Secretary John Monks wrote: "Enough is enough. Asthma is simple to control in the workplace because unlike the things that cause asthma in children, employers can control what their workers are exposed to. Too many employers seem to think that asthma won't cost them any money because the NHS will pay for treatment – but the NHS itself is an employer that loses millions by not controlling asthma at work, and they are currently part of the problem, not part of

TUC wants legal right to know if the place where you live or work is contaminated with asbestos

IN A submission to the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) on new asbestos Regulations, published recently, the TUC has welcomed HSC proposals to require employers to survey their buildings for asbestos, but calls for a public register of the asbestos in British buildings, such as homes, hospitals, schools and other workplaces.

The TUC believes that the public and workers should have a right to know where there is asbestos in the 850,000 commercial premises, 400,000 flats and 150,000 houses which contain the fatal fibre. The public register should be freely accessible, for example on the internet.

TUC General Secretary John Monks said:

"Every year, 4,500 people die from asbestos-related diseases in Great Britain, and the main source of exposure in the future will be from the decay and disturbance of asbestos in premises across Britain. The TUC has long campaigned on this issue and strongly welcomes the Commission's proposals, although we would like to see them go further.

"We welcome in particular the provisions for union safety reps to be involved in the management of asbestos risks, and will be producing guidance for safety reps on how to make the most of the opportunities presented by

because employers won't use alternatives

the solution. Employers need to wake up and stop their workers suffering needlessly."

'No substitute for action on asthma' reports the results of a survey of almost a thousand workplace union safety reps conducted by the TUC with support from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Its findings were presented to the first meeting in January of a HSE Project Board set up to oversee a programme of action designed to reduce rates of occupational asthma ahead of the introduction of a legally-binding code of practice on asthma in the summer.

The survey found that only 8% of employers were substituting the asthma-causing substances with safer alternatives (the first step recommended by the code of practice).

The most common preventive tool being used is respiratory protective equipment (masks etc) which should be the last thing employers reach for when protecting their workforce.

There are over 150,000 people in Great Britain with occupational asthma. Every year, between 1,500 and 7,000 adults develop asthma because of their work (recent research suggests

that workplace exposures cause a third of all adult-onset asthma), and the HSE campaign will be targeting the eight main workplace causes of asthma.

The TUC survey of safety reps found that, of these, workers were most exposed to:

- glues and resins
- wood dust
- latex.

The other top five substances are isocyanates (widely used as a bonding agent, e.g. in spray paints), solder/colophony, flour and grain, the disinfectant glutaraldehyde and laboratory animals.

The TUC survey wants action to:

- make employers understand the cost implications of not protecting their workforce
- encourage employers to use alternatives to asthma-causing substances
- increase training about preventing asthma – the TUC this month launched a new course for safety reps on asthma, based on the forthcoming code of practice.



Contractors wearing protective clothing and breathing apparatus removing asbestos from a Stratford on Avon refuse tip. The asbestos was found by workers clearing the site for housing to be built. Nearby residents had been worried about the contents of the tip and the potential health risks for some time. Council officials and Health and Safety inspectors monitored the removal.

the regulations.

"The public and workers must have a legal right to know if they are living or working in the vicinity of asbestos through a public register of asbestos in buildings.

"The protection promised

by the new regulations rightly concentrates on those most at risk – workers engaged in repair, renovation and removal as well as workers in the emergency services. But the needs of others, such as the general public and workers in buildings with

asbestos present, also need to be addressed.

"In the long run, all asbestos in all British buildings needs to be removed. As a start, however, the regulations proposed by the Commission should be brought into force without delay."

The TUC also wants to see:

MORE PEOPLE PROTECTED

In addition to the groups of workers most at risk, there are new waves of workers and people who although less at risk, are still exposed to the possibility of disease, disablement and death. The TUC wants these people to be covered by the regulations and wants to see the proposed regulations strengthened to include accidental or potential, rather than simply planned, disturbance of asbestos.

FASTER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW REGULATIONS

The TUC wants to see the changes set out in the Commission proposals introduced as soon as possible. A one-year implementation deadline is more appropriate than 18 months or two years, as suggested for different parts of the regulations.

TUC NEWS

Joint campaign to crack down on deaths at work

THE TUC joined with the Centre for Corporate Accountability (CCA) to launch a new campaign to improve workplace safety standards by getting tougher on law enforcement and corporate accountability, including new laws and more resources for the Health and Safety Executive and Local Authorities. The new campaign will, for the first time, bring trade unions, safety organisations and bereaved families (from both work-related deaths and disasters) into a coalition demanding Government action on a core set of safety demands.

At the launch, TUC General Secretary John Monks joined relatives of victims to unveil a map revealing, region by region, where 1500 people have been killed at work over the last five years. A new document was released at the launch which sets out a series of specific proposals to end this catalogue of death, as well as serious work-related injuries and illness.

Some of the measures being called for by the TUC and the Centre for Corporate Accountability are:

- legally binding safety duties upon individual company directors;
- a new law on corporate killing;
- a substantial increase in the number of health and safety inspectors;
- giving union safety representatives the power to serve provisional improvement notices;
- the abolition of Crown and Parliamentary immunity from prosecution under health and safety law;
- higher fines and more innovative penalties for breaches of health and safety law;
- courts to have the option of imprisoning company directors and managers convicted of any health and safety offence; and
- a tougher prosecution policy, particularly in relation to the conduct of directors.

TUC General Secretary John Monks said: "A strong framework of laws is the hallmark of a civilised society, and nowhere more than in health and safety. Two hundred years after the first health and safety law was introduced in Britain, we need those laws more than ever to protect the vulnerable and prevent cowboys from dragging health and safety standards down to the lowest or cheapest level.

"Health and safety is a mix of advice and enforcement. Unions and employers working in partnership can do so much better than the law lays down, but we don't want anyone to get away with less, because that means more deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deaths at work are always an emotive subject and no employer wants to be tarred with the brush of criminality – but enforcement can't be designed only with good, honest employers trying to do their best in mind – it needs to catch the cowboys and the criminals.

"Working people want justice and protection, and unions want a Safety Bill and a new law on corporate killing that will deliver both objectives, as soon as possible."

David Bergman, Executive Director of the Centre for Corporate Accountability said: "It is time for the Government to take action that will improve work-place health and safety, increase law enforcement and promote corporate accountability. Significant reforms in law and policy are necessary to ensure that dangerous companies are made safe and that those companies and directors who negligently or recklessly cause death, injury or disease or who place others at unacceptable risks are held to account."

UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG BLACK AND ASIAN WORKERS

RACISM is still a major problem in Britain's workplaces as unemployment remains up to three times higher among black and Asian workers than it is among white workers in some parts of the country.

Responding to this problem the TUC recently launched a new advice leaflet *Racism at Work*, to help workers tackle the problem.

Figures revealed recently by the TUC show that unemployment among black and Asian workers stands at 11 per cent nationally compared to 5 per cent for their white counterparts.

In the West Midlands black and Asian unemployment is as high as 15 per cent compared to 5 per cent among white workers in the region.

The new leaflet asks: "Is there racial bullying or discrimination in your workplace?" And it suggests that workers suffering discrimination to contact their union workplace representative, or go to their Union equality officer at Head Office, or ring the TUC's Know your rights line on 0870 600 4 882 for help.

The leaflet contains ten different languages through which



The TUC handed over a 15,000 signature petition calling for a law to provide equal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexuality to government ministers last month. Signatures were collected throughout last summer at Pride events and by Union Equality Committees. Left to right: Tony Lloyd MP, Chair Trade Union Group of Labour MPs; John Monks, TUC General Secretary; Alan Johnson, Industry Minister; Terry Richardson, Region 11 FBU Gay & Lesbian Rep; Stewart Brown, FBU National Gay & Lesbian Secretary; Barbara Roche, Equalities Minister; Pat Carberry, FBU National Gay & Lesbian Chair; Tony Young, TUC President.

Call for equal pension rights

THE TUC is calling for new equality laws to give equal pension rights for lesbian and gay workers as well as to all other unmarried partners.

Leading legal experts will come together to look at how the Government should bring in the new equality laws required by Europe. The new equality laws will, for the first time, ban discrimination against lesbian and gay workers, older workers and those with religious belief.

The Government is consulting widely on the new laws, including how new rights for lesbian and gay workers should operate. The current Government proposals would exclude at least 200,000 lesbian and gay workers from nominating a partner

as a pension beneficiary.

TUC Deputy General Secretary, Brendan Barber said: "Lesbian and gay workers pay the same pension contributions as other staff. Fairness requires that they get the same treatment, including the right to nominate a surviving partner to benefit from pension rights.

"The TUC wants to see a proactive framework of equality law in the UK. Employers should be placed under positive duties to promote equality. Such an approach will encourage partnership at work and avoid individual litigation. New positive duties will give Unions the chance to engage constructively with employers to ensure equal treatment for all groups in the workforce."

UP TO THREE TIMES HIGHER

readers are invited to join a Union. The languages are: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu and Welsh. The leaflets will be distributed by trades union councils, who are the trade unions' campaigning arm in the community.

TUC Organising Officer, Raj Jethwa, said: "Unions are stepping up their campaigning against this appalling workplace racism. We are aiming to help black and Asian workers take action against exclusion from job opportunities, being passed over for promotion and bullying."

UNEMPLOYMENT BY REGION

REGION	WHITE WORKERS	BLACK AND ASIAN WORKERS
London	5%	12%
North West	5%	12%
South East	3%	6%
Yorkshire & Humberside	5%	11%
West Midlands	5%	15%
National	5%	11%

Regions not listed have sample sizes too small for reliable figures. Source: Labour Force Survey (Sept - Nov 2001)

EDUCATION



Computing for the terrified

Malcolm Peel
Chair, Region 4

THE first of these courses took place at Wortley Hall from 30th November – 2nd December 2001. Eight students took up places on the course from as far afield as Grampian, London and South Wales. The course is a partnership between the FBU and Insight Dynamics, who have an in-house computer suite at Wortley Hall, set in the Moffat Wing. The tutor for the course would be Janice Seeley.

It was an aptly named course. From the initial get together, a varied range of experience was declared. Most of the students had a little experience, some of which were bad experiences where computers had misbehaved; some had used computers at work, but had no formal training and others knew nothing at all.

This education started gently by turning on the power and an introduction to Windows based programmes, moving on to the standard Word functions and commands. By the end of the first day everyone had various screen savers in place and had clicked and double-clicked their way through icons, folders and programmes. They were already less terrified.

The second day went into more detail with word processing

and focused on increasing the knowledge of Word and practising the skills required to open, save and manage documents. An exploration into inputting data and graphics into documents to use as posters proved useful, as was the additional knowledge of some of the useful tools within the programme. An introduction to the Internet followed with students logging on and accessing the Web, most of them for the first time. Practically everyone agreed that it was a lot easier than they had thought and their fears were becoming less and less.

The third day saw the computers fight back. The Internet was inaccessible due to a server fault, but CD-based tutorials came to the rescue with some students finding out about E-mail addresses, while others took on spreadsheets with Janice.

The closing session saw that everyone now had a more positive approach to computers, including some who are considering buying a PC for the first time. Others with limited experience were intending to get an E-mail address and the remainder now had the confidence to spend more time practicing their new skills.

The 'team photograph' (above) gives the indication of the members becoming less and less terrified as they progressed through the course

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

The French connection

Mark Simmons
Kent chair

On 22 January the French Firefighters Union (SNSPP) paid Kent a four-day visit to meet the FBU, and to further cement a close relationship built up over the past five years

SNSPP stands for the Syndicat National des Sapeurs Pompiers Professionnels. In English it translates to: the National Syndicate of Professional Firefighters. In France this is the largest union representing firefighters, with a membership of around 20,000. At the moment one in five French firefighters belongs to the SNSPP. This is a figure which is rising rapidly.

Our relationship with the SNSPP came about due to the Channel Tunnel, which is jointly patrolled and afforded fire cover by both French and English firefighters.

The SNSPP and FBU have worked in harmony and unity from day one of the Tunnel opening. A clear example of this was when the Channel Tunnel operators, Eurotunnel, began making plans to replace the French and English firefighters with a privately owned outfit. Our French comrades immediately responded with a blockade of the Tunnel at Calais. Myself and other Kent Officials were present on that day in Calais. (And what a marvellous day it was – resulting in the fire cover for the Channel Tunnel remaining in public hands).

The visit kicked off on Thursday 22nd January at the Ashford International Hotel in Kent, where Ernie Thornton (EC Member), Harry Sawyer (Brigade Sec), and myself met the SNSPP delegation.

The French delegation consisted of: Daniel Dremiere (National Treasurer, and likely new President next year); Patrice Beunard (General Secretary); Jean-Michel Piedalu (National Executive); Olivier Bouget-Durelli (National Executive); Jacques Estermans (General Secretary CFTC).

After initial introductions we all headed off to Kingston upon Thames, arriving at around 16:00 hours. We gave our visitors a



Mike Fordham (left) and Daniel Dremiere exchange gifts

short tour of the FBU Head Office, with customary introductions. We then made our way to our hotel for the evening.

A little later we met up with Mick Harper, Andy Gilchrist, and Mike Fordham, and after the formal introductions we all sat down for an evening meal.

Wednesday 23rd, saw the day start off with an informal meeting headed by Mike Fordham, concerning European issues.

The meeting lasted most of the morning, where after a light lunch we set off on the next leg of the visit – Fire Service College, Morton. That evening the delegation were guests of honour at the College, having been introduced to the Commandant, Mr Terry Glossop, and his staff. Our French comrades were treated to some fine English cuisine, followed by both parties giving heart felt after dinner speeches.

The following morning, Thursday 23rd, the SNSPP were given a comprehensive tour of the Fire Service College facilities, which led us up to lunchtime. Having spent an arm and a leg in the College gift shop, and been fully fed and watered, we set off for the final leg of the visit – back to Ashford.

The final evening was spent at the Ashford International with invited guests, including Kent's Principal Officers and our retired EC Member Tony Willshaw – who was instrumental in setting up relations with the SNSPP.

The whole visit itself has brought us another step closer, and proved yet again that the FBU is an internationalist organisation, with a strong desire to see workers of the world unite with common understandings and goals.

I'd like to thank the Head Office Officials and Staff for their support and advice throughout the visit. I'd also like to thank the Commandant and Staff at Fire Service College for their hospitality. Grateful thanks to the Kent Brigade Management for the loan of the PCV minibus and to my Brigade Secretary for volunteering to drive it!

Lastly, thanks to Ernie Thornton for organising the whole thing.

VIEWPOINT

Public service: Why we must win the political debate



John McDonald
Regional Official
Number 1 Region
Scotland

TONY Blair has intensified the debate on the privatisation of public services. He is attempting to demonise those who oppose the use of the Private Finance Initiative to fund public services. It is a debate that needs to take place within the fire service before we find that the service has been privatised by stealth.

The Fire Service is facing its most important period of change since the Cunningham and Holroyd reports of the seventies. Some of the issues currently in the melting pot are the reviews into the standards of fire cover, pensions, rank structure and the employers continuing attacks on conditions of service. The union has also had to fight many difficult campaigns to stop our members being sacked on the spurious grounds of capability.

The prison service faced similar attacks. The right to strike was taken away. Then changes to shift patterns and conditions of service changes were imposed. PFI was introduced as the preferred method of funding. Result: privatised prisons run by very dubious American corporations who hide behind commercial confidentiality whenever they are asked questions on such issues as staff/prisoner ratios. They have been roundly condemned by HMI of Prisons but continue to blunder on with the tacit support of Government. Compare this culture of secrecy with the openness and accountability within the Fire Service. We are subject to annual reports by the HMI and Chief Officers. The Audit Commission and internal auditors make regular reports, all of which are in the public domain. It is only right that a public service should be open to scrutiny and accountability. The Government preaches openness and transparency unfortunately it doesn't practise openness when it comes to privatised services.

Housing, education, roads, and the health service have been dragged toward the same fate.

The fire service is no different from any other public service in that it faces the imposition of privatisation upon our service. This is obviously a political issue driven by the Government and major corporations who are determined to get a slice of the "lucrative" public sector market. If anyone believes we are being alarmist they should look at the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (G.A.T.T.). This agreement makes it quite clear that any corporation is entitled to bid for the right to run Local or Government services. Failure to accept the bid leaves the Government open to a dispute on "fair trade" with the World Trade Organisation.

In Scotland a "White Paper" is out for consultation on the future of the fire service. Every page is dominated by reference to consultants determining the future of the fire service under the guise of Best Value. The consultant's reports will undoubtedly demand the use of PFI to finance the fire service and increase the role of the private sector in managing the service. Recommendations to amalgamate controls are at the forefront of their agenda despite previous assurances that this was not the path they intended to follow. The fact that the credibility of consultants such as Arthur Anderson are at an all time low after the Enron scandal will not diminish their standing in the eyes of Government Ministers.

We have seen the resignations of the high and mighty such as Lord Wakeham after it was revealed that he recommended the handing of a contract to privatise a nuclear power station to Enron whilst receiving over £60,000 in fees as a director on the audit board of this discredited company. I doubt that even this scandal will diminish the Government's thirst for privatisation.

It appears that the Government cannot be shaken from its belief that private sector equals good public service bad. They are blind to the inefficiency of the likes of Railtrack who ignore safety resulting in tragedy and death and put Britain in the position of having the worst train service in Europe. The managing director of course scuttles off with a million pound severance payment in recognition of his incompetence. Surely this is not "BEST VALUE". As firefighters and control staff we are proud to work in the public sector in a job that saves lives and provides exceptional public service.

The Fire Service is well aware of the difficult issues of under funding and the pension time bomb that the services face. We do not require any more expensive consultants' reports to determine the future of the service. There is an old adage that to fatten an animal you should stop weighing it and feed it. We are



saying quite clearly to the Government give us the resources and we will do the job.

It is disgraceful that public service workers are pilloried by politicians as "wreckers" because we believe in public service. It is hardly revolutionary to believe that the caring services should be publicly funded and not run for the benefit of shareholders and fat cat directors. We risk our lives to protect life; the fire service is run efficiently and delivers best value.

The FBU has campaigned for many years to prevent station closures and reductions in the standard of service. We can be proud of our achievements in standing up for the fire service and the public we protect.

This article is not an attack on the private sector; we have always worked closely with the private sector and will continue to do so. It is a condemnation of the use of PFI. We condemn it because it is one of the most expensive and inefficient methods of borrowing money. It is mortgaging the future of the service. It will have the same disastrous effect on front line appliances as the employer's failure to address the pension time bomb.

I believe that the Fire Service will change dramatically in the next few years. FBU members have never been fearful or obstructive to change. We promoted the health and safety of our members when our employers were trying to exempt the Fire Service from the H&S at Work Act. We have campaigned successfully against the lowering of the standards of fire cover. The FBU has taken our employers to court to ensure individual members would not have their pension entitlement taken from them. We are sponsoring a Fire Safety Bill in Parliament, which will greatly enhance the Fire Services

primary role in this essential area of public safety.

The FBU will continue to act in the best interests of our members and the public that we serve. To do so we need the support and unity of every union member. We must contact our Members of Parliament and support every platform that promotes the vision that public services should not be run for private profit. The most recent MORI determined that 83% of the public wish an end to privatisation of the services. We must build on that support and ensure the future health of our service. Our unity has always been our strength and we must win the political debate and promote public service over private greed and inefficiency.

LETTERS

CONCERNED ABOUT CONTENT OF FIREFIGHTER

Dear Firefighter,

Many of my colleagues and I are becoming worried about the content of "OUR" FBU magazine "Firefighter". Primarily, our concern is the Union's outspoken support of individuals, groups and its interest in the politics of other countries, which is spread throughout each issue of the magazine.

Whilst we have every sympathy with the groups or individuals who are being persecuted or physically harmed in any conflict and would like to see an end to all acts of violence and terrorism worldwide, we believe that our FBU should be seen to be directing its energies into issues that affect the working conditions of the British firefighter only. Perhaps a long overdue review of the Fire Services Act or the flagging pay formula which, due to the nature of a national agreement, leaves some firefighters on income support, whilst others enjoy a comfortable existence; or a firefighter having to commute for over three hours each duty with no travelling allowance as they cannot afford to live near their own station ground and are then forced to transfer to other Brigades.

Mr. Gilchrist's paragraph in the September/October issue gives the impression that the FBU will soon be seeking a seat in Parliament. He talks of the Palestine/Israeli conflict as if the FBU is part of the peace-keeping process when he talks of trying to secure a "ceasefire". We hope that he has considered the impact that his statements or his position may have on firefighters in the USA when he says in his final paragraph, "Whatever happened on 11 September and whoever is responsible does not change the fundamentals of the Palestine/Israel conflict." Although the attacks were not carried out by these groups of people, he infers that if it had been, he would still have to support the "Fundamentals" of the conflict. We do not remember being asked to vote whether OUR FBU should be a force in world politics or crime-fighting. Please advise us how this came about. It is not the duty of OUR FBU to broker peace deals in any country or to protect anyone other than the firefighters of Britain. Get Out, Stay Out and Keep the Fire Brigade Out!!

During the past number of months we have been sure to hide the Firefighter magazine when members of the public visit our station in case we are asked any awkward questions about the front covers featuring Cuban leaders etc. We have always enjoyed public support and an appreciation of the service that we offer them, but such material would make any member of the public think twice.

Please review the content of OUR magazine and ensure that in the future, only issues that are relevant to firefighters in the UK are featured. Rid the magazine of the political views, which makes adverse national news (*Sun* newspaper January 2002) that will, no doubt, damage our public image.

Paul Crowther

WE'RE ALL TERRORISTS NOW!

Dear Firefighter,

Is your house a bomb making factory? Is the little old lady upstairs really an international terrorist? Well, this Government seems to think so!

Apparently, we are all potential terrorists and as such need to be subjected to the new and wide-ranging anti terrorism legislation – The Anti Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. This legislation adds to a total of 85 Acts relating to crime and criminal justice, which have been passed since Thatcher came to power in 1979. Has everyday life really got that dangerous in the last twenty odd years? I don't believe so!

In reality, life is getting more intolerable due to increases in poverty and job insecurity, but there's been little legislation or other action to remedy these problems. Crime is of course a problem, but 85 Acts has not led to any major reduction in crime, though it could be argued that some of the new powers may be useful in tracking down terrorists, many believe that the powers already available were ample.

But this legislation sweeps through a wide range of questionable measures against anyone regarded, in any way, as possibly subversive. People can be detained indefinitely on the basis, not on what they have done, but on what some intelligence officer or police officer thinks they may do. There is no judicial process and no charges have to be brought.

The new Act will also give police unprecedented right of access to everyone's private and personal information, without control, checks or safeguards, provided only that it may be useful in an investigation and this power can be used against anyone seen by the Authorities as posing any sort of threat to the status quo. The Act lumps together terrorists with anti-war demonstrators, animal rights protestors and trade unions involved in industrial action.

September 11th was a terrible atrocity, but our Government has used it to rush through an Act that would never have been acceptable before. An Act that increases even more, the powers of the establishment over anyone who dissents with it.

Ashley Drage

Region 10 Political and Industrial Organiser

WE NEED A PARTY THAT BELIEVES IN SOCIALISM

Dear Firefighter,

During my time in the Fire Brigade I campaigned for the return of the Labour Party to put right the nastiness of Tory Policy. I find

CONTINUED PAGE 23

Fire Brigades Union

EDUCATION SCHOOLS 2002

**Branch
Officials
school**

Glasgow
5–7 March

**Annual Women's
School**

Sheffield
8–10 March

Branch Officials School

Belfast
22–24 March

Branch Officials School

Sheffield
9–11 April

**Branch Officials
Fairness at Work School**

London
19–21 April

**Branch Officials
Health & Safety School**

Eastbourne
29 April–1 May

Branch Officials School

London
28–30 May

Branch Officials School

Bristol
7–9 June

**Branch Officials
Fairness at Work School**

Sheffield
25–27 June

● **Creche facilities available**

● **All reasonable expenses
will be met**

● **Application forms are available
from Brigade Officials**

● **Apply online at
www.fbu.org.uk/education**

**Branch
Officials
Health &
Safety School**
Cumbria
20–22
September

● **Completed forms
should be sent to
your Regional
Secretary**

**Branch Officials
Political School**
Sheffield
27–29 September

Annual BAEMM School
Sheffield
11–13 October

NATIONAL SCHOOL
Sheffield
2–8 November

Annual Gay and Lesbian School
Sheffield
20–22 October



Education



SOUTH AFRICAN WATER PRIVATISATION



Members of the Johannesburg Anti-Privatisation Forum protest

Privatisation cannot tackle apartheid legacy

FOR Phelisa, having clean running water whenever she needs it is still a distant dream. If she's lucky, she can collect water from a community standpipe that runs for a couple of hours per day. If not, she walks five miles to collect a ten-litre barrel that she carries back on her head in the blistering heat. This is post-apartheid South Africa.

The totally inadequate access to water and sanitation faced by the majority of black South Africans shocked workers from some of Britain's biggest water companies during a solidarity delegation led by War on Want last month. But what the trade union delegates found even more unacceptable is that Western shareholders are profiting from this misery: and have done since the South African government embarked on an extensive privatisation programme in the mid 1990s.

Utility privatisation is being driven by the GEAR (Growth

Employment and Redistribution) programme – a “World Bank inspired policy of cost recovery”, according to activists. Launched in 1996, this policy replaced the ANC's original, and popular, Reconstruction and Development Programme, which aspired to build social housing and connect hundreds of thousands to public utilities, by 2001.

The failure of privatisation can be seen everywhere in South Africa. The township of Embalenhle consists of thousands of “houses”: scraps of rusting metal and wood, barely held together. Sanitation is provided by the “bucket system”. Sewerage is disposed of in buckets that have to be taken to the neighbouring sewerage plant. It constitutes a major health hazard and helps explain why cholera re-emerged in South Africa in August 2000 and has now affected 140,000 people, 250 fatally.

Yet half an hour's drive away, some of the richest corporations

in the world own lavish buildings shaped like diamonds and aeroplanes, and mimicking the Taj Mahal. White people enjoy a Western lifestyle, complete with swimming pools and unrestricted water access.

Recently South Africa has overtaken Brazil as the most unequal country in the world. The people were promised that privatisation would solve their problems by providing investment to extend the water supply to those beaten down by apartheid. But there is little evidence.

Outside Nelspruit, an area whose water supply was recently taken over by British-based multi-national Biwater, we found communities that were enduring their fourth consecutive day without water. To add insult to injury, privatisation has ushered in vastly increased water rates and strict metering.

Non payment is common in areas where 75 per cent of people are unemployed, or earning very little in the vast informal sector. Municipal workers' union SAMWU claim that water tariffs rose by up to 400 per cent after the Nelspruit privatisation. Those who could not pay were disconnected – reinforcing their poverty.

In Johannesburg, Suez-Lyonnaise – the same company that controls Northumbria Water in Britain – has taken over management of the Water Utility. While working conditions are visibly better, employees stressed that since profit became the bottom line cost cutting had become paramount. One worker told us: "Every time a leak needs to be fixed, every time we need a new piece of equipment, we need to justify it."

The results were obvious enough. Pipes visibly spewing water into the street – sometimes for several weeks – ultimately costing more than the new infrastructure saves. Thanks to one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, all South Africans are theoretically entitled to 6,000 litres of free water per month. But community leaders claim this is not happening in Johannesburg because no account is being taken of leaking pipes and inadequate infrastructure. Much of the free water never reaches recipients.



**Johannesburg Anti-Privatisation
Forum leader Trevor Ngwane**

There is no argument with the fact that massive investment is necessary in South Africa, but SAMWU questions the social justice and expediency of turning water into a commodity, especially at a time when the government has entered into a £4billion arms deal with manufacturers from Western Europe. It is money that could have gone a long way to meeting people's basic needs.

Creative attempts have been made on the ground to examine alternatives to private investment. In Odi, a former township near Pretoria, a "public-public partnership" between a para-statal water supplier and the municipality was launched, that emphasised investment with public control. But two years on, the project has faltered on political will. The subsidy that the government promised to help get the scheme off the ground has not materialised, and desperate communities are increasingly making illegal connections to the water supply.

But there is a renewed radicalism amongst those same communities that brought down apartheid less than a decade ago. Growing union dissatisfaction with the government's economic policy is threatening the governing alliance: comprised of the ANC, Communist Party and trade-union federation COSATU. Powerful new community groups, under the umbrella of the Anti-Privatisation Forum, have their roots in the very poorest communities, for whom apartheid remains a material reality. The assertion that privatisation can heal South Africa's gaping social divide is rapidly being exposed as a lie.

**For more information on the joint delegation and the affects of privatisation in South Africa contact:
Nick Dearden, Campaigns Officer, War on Want on
020 7620 1111 email ndearden@waronwant.org
or visit www.waronwant.org**

**Johannesburg Anti-Privatisation Forum:
www.cosatu.org.za/samwu/apf.htm**

WE NEED A PARTY THAT BELIEVES IN SOCIALISM

FROM PAGE 20

it hard to take, that I have been let down by Tony Blair and all his stupid reliance on "Private Finance".

I heartily agree with Peter Giblin, OOT member Kingston on Hull East, in his letter in Firefighter Jan/Feb Issue.

It seems that after fighting the Tories, we now have to fight those who say they are our own.

I do not think for one second that Tony Blair and his "Yes"

boys have any idea of what it means to work for a living. They are a total shambles and should be kicked out. We need a Labour Party that truly believes in "Socialism". I hoped for a new start, but feel terribly let down.

All members of the FBU must keep vigilant and keep fighting. Get up from your chairs and support your Union.

**T.M. Burden
OOT Member, Hertfordshire**

SAHARAWI SUPPORT CONFERENCE



People of the Sahara continue their struggle

Tam Tierney
Regional Secretary, Region 1

AT THE end of November last year, the 27th European Conference of support was held in Seville.

The conference was attended by almost 400 delegates and, despite its official title – “European” – delegates attended from all over the world; Cuba, Australia, South Africa to name a few.

In open session the conference roundly condemned the inactivity of the United Nations in bringing about a referendum for self determination and their apparent insistence that the Western Sahara becomes an almost self-governing “province” of Morocco.

As well as the open sessions, the conference also broke up into work-groups to discuss several issues such as aid to the camps, education in the camps and legal assistance in countering the UN’s stand against the referendum. Another workshop, of special interest to the FBU representatives there, was discussing assistance that Trades Unions could give to the Saharawi people’s trade union UGTSARIO.

Following discussions between the Unions represented there, the points listed below were eventually agreed and put to the full conference for ratification.

- To reaffirm political and moral support to the Saharawi cause, and to the UGTSARIO in their struggle for self-determination.
- To urge the United Nations to again take up the peace process as an instrument for holding the referendum on self-determination of the Saharawi people.
- To condemn strongly any attempt to supplant the referendum process with any false solution whose objective perpetuates the Moroccan colonial occupation of Western Sahara, whether it is called “framework agreement” or “third way” or any other name.
- To express serious concern and condemn the systematic violation of human rights of the Saharawi citizens in the occupied territory of Western Sahara, as well as expressing solidarity with the disappeared Saharawi’s and with all the victims of terror and of the Moroccan oppression.
- To call on the ETUC to participate actively in the defence of the legitimate right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.



tion and independence.

- The necessity of organising a conference of European trade unions to show solidarity with the Saharawi cause, during 2002.
- To adhere to all the resolutions adopted by the 27th European Conference and to congratulate the European arc*, which has shown solidarity with the SDAR, for the success of this conference.

Signed: CC.OO [Comisiones Obreras, Spain], ELA-UGTA (Algeria), CGTP (Portugal), FBU (UK), UNISON (UK), FSU (Australia), UGTSARIO

Whilst the conference was an undoubted success and all of

the work-groups agreed to increase their efforts of assistance, it was unfortunate that only two unions from the UK could manage to attend. The FBU and UNISON delegates who did attend agreed that more effort must be put into encouraging participation by more Trades Unions and we will work towards that for any future conferences or visitations to the refugee camps.

The FBU recently circulated details of a letter campaign aimed at the King of Morocco and the General Secretary of the United Nations. Through campaigns like this and more support from the Trades Unions we hope that human rights abuses against the Saharawi will cease and that the UN will finally agree to the promised referendum and allow them to return to their homeland.

Tam Tierney, Pete Skinley

* I assume this means all the European organisations taking part in the conference

PALESTINE

Palestinians are still human right to own

A mass campaign, uniting all those who support the fundamental rights of the Palestinians is needed now more than ever, says the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

OVER 900 Palestinians have died since September 2000 and 14,000 have been injured. The wounds they have sustained indicate that Israel operates a shoot to kill policy. There is very clearly a crisis in the region and very clearly the root cause is Israel's failure to implement the UN resolution and the Oslo accords, choosing instead to suppress the Palestinians with military force. On 4 December 2000, for example, the General Assembly voted by 170 to 2 with 5 abstentions that it "reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including their right to a State." Israel has simply ignored this.

Time and again the Palestinian Authority has tried to negotiate. Time and again Sharon's Government have provoked violence or simply moved in tanks with the specific aim of smashing up the emergent Palestinian state's economy.

United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (Article 13) states that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and

residence within the borders of each state (and) the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country". The Palestinians are denied this human right.

The Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank is illegal under international law. Yet, whilst there were high hopes in the 1990s following the Oslo agreement, no Israeli Government since has taken any steps to withdraw troops or stop the building of settlements on this illegally occupied land. The Israeli occupation has been intensified. Under Ehud Barak, the Labour Prime Minister of Israel, the building of settlements on illegally occupied Palestinian territory actually increased threefold. An estimated 10,000 illegally built houses stand empty whilst the IDF has bulldozed Palestinian homes to the ground.

Ariel Sharon's Cabinet reflects his politics. Sharon himself was found culpable by an Israeli inquiry in the 1980s for aiding and abetting Lebanese Phalangists who murdered several thousand Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla in September 1982. (Recently covered in a Panorama programme.)

Rehavam Ze'evi, Cabinet Minister who was assassinated, said the Israeli army should "pick out the lice and throw them out". Another of the Cabinet members described the Palestinians as a "cancer".

When such things have happened elsewhere in the world the reaction from Britain and the United States have lead the way in a sharp, sometimes and uncompromising reaction. But, in stark contrast, the hard right Sharon Government have had nothing more than a mild ticking off over their current behaviour.

Those who hold such racist views have no right to invoke the horror of the holocaust to mask their inhumanity. To be critical of the Government of Israel is not anti-Semitism. To be silent about the fate of the Palestinian people and to fail to condemn that Government is to acquiesce to gross injustice and inhumanity.

Between 1917 and 1948 Britain held an international mandate for Palestine. Successive British Governments denied the Palestinians the right to self-determination in particular by suppressing the uprising in 1936-39. Now over 60% of Palestinians are refugees. They are so because of British policies in the past and the continuing callousness of many nations now. Britain must take responsibility for its actions in the past and support the Palestinians search for justice. Trade unionists in Britain have a

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25 YEAR BADGES

John Stone (left) and Alan Bartlam (below) receive their 25 year badges from West Sussex Branch Secretary Tim Smart



Richard Howard, Scarborough, receives his 25 year badge from Brigade Secretary John Mitchell



John Duncan, Broughton branch, receives his 25 year badge from Branch Secretary Chris Raynes



Chris Fitzgerald receives his 25 year badge from Region 11 Officers Rep Pan Poullais



Phil Saunderson receives his 25 year badge from Finchley Branch Secretary Greg Edwards, and Steve Hughes receives his from Mick Bailey

Kevin Murray receives his 25 year badge from Tony Topping at Lancashire Fire Service Headquarters



denied country

More than 60% of Palestinians are refugees. They are so because of British policies in the past and the continuing callousness of many nations now. Britain must take responsibility for its actions in the past and support the Palestinians' search for justice.

role to play to support the Palestinian people and to seek to persuade the British Government to act. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others have been arguing for unions to play such a role.

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign has been campaigning for more than 20 years to build a mass campaign in support of the Palestinian people. Most recently the campaign has won the backing of Hanan Ashwari, Tony Benn, George Galloway MP, Emma Thompson, Ken Cameron, Bruce Kent, Michael Rosen, Benjamin Zephaniah, Moshe Machover and many others for a boycott of Israeli goods and leisure tourism.

A mass campaign, uniting all those who support the fundamental rights of the Palestinians is needed now more than ever. The trade union movement has a central role in building that movement for justice.

Many Palestinians now have no way of earning money to live and have no other means of support.

■ For further information or to get involved in the campaign for a just solution to the crisis in the Israeli occupied territories contact:

Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Box BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX
Secretary Betty Hunter, Tel 020 7700 6192

Web: www.palestinecampaign.org

Email: info@palestinecampaign.org

25 YEAR BADGES



Stu Thompson (above) and Alan Hood (below) of Tunstall Fire Station, Sunderland, receive their 25 year badges from Tyne and Wear Divisional Rep Gordon Chalk



Alan Maughan of Tunstall Fire Station, Sunderland receiving his 25 year badge from Tyne and Wear Divisional Rep, Gordon Chalk



Barry Oakes (above) and Peter Coombes (below) of Region 11, receive their 25 year badges from Officers Rep Pan Poullais



Firefighter Tony Carvell, Region 6 ONC rep, receives his 25 year badge from Andy Brickles, Region 6 Chair



Les Redgate receives his 25 year badge from Rob Finch, Notts Brigade Chair



Stewart Holmes, Region 6 FAW Rep is presented with a retirement gift from Dave Green, R6 EC member



Dave Stewart and Andy Martin receive their 25 year badges from Steve Robinson-Day, Brigade Secretary, Notts



Sue Morris of West Midlands Fire Service receives her 25 year badge from Branch Secretary West Midlands and Regional Control Rep No. 7 Region, Rosemarie Jones



Meg Gregson of West Midlands Fire Service receives her 25 year badge from Branch Secretary West Midlands and Regional Control Rep No. 7 Region, Rosemarie Jones



Keith Mills, Paul Hibbert, Gordon Griffiths and Pete Townsend of Rugby, receive their 25 year badge from Sister Sharon Sales-Mossop, Warwickshire Brigade Women's Rep



Steve Moule and Pete Cooper receive their 25 year badges from Danny West, Group 2 Secretary, and Mick Shaw, EC member



Sarah Squirrell, Membership Secretary, Suffolk Branch, receives Terry Price's 25 year badge on his behalf from Brigade Secretary Paul Woolstenholmes



Terry Calvert, FBU Branch Secretary, Chingford, receives his 25 year badge from Nick Williams



Bernie Smith receives his 25 year badge from Region 11 Officers rep Pan Poullais



John Talbot receives his 25 year badge from Region 11 Officers Rep Pan Poullais