

FIREFIGHTER

Pensions Special January 20th 2006

FBU Conference is Recalled Members asked to discuss industrial Action

It's time to stand up for our pension rights

General Secretary calls for urgent talks with Minister

The Executive Council of the Fire Brigades Union met last week to discuss developments in relation to pensions. All members were informed before Christmas that this meeting was due to take place and would be considering the recalling of conference and the possibility of industrial action.

Despite months of talks at the Firefighters Pension Committee and attempts to discuss key issues with Ministers, the Government have made no concessions in relation to their proposals for the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS). Members in the Local Government Pension Scheme face similar attacks including an end to the Rule of 85 which would have the affect of increasing the retirement age for many members of the scheme.

Their proposals would:

- Increase the age at which many members could retire
- Alter the arrangements for those forced to retire because of accidents received in the course of duty
- Worsen the arrangements for members forced to retire due to ill-health (not due to service)

The Government also intend to introduce a completely new (and generally worse) Firefighters Pension Scheme for people who join the fire service after April 2006. **Further details of how**

these proposals affect you are included on page 4.

General Secretary Matt Wrack reported to the Executive Council that the national talks on the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) had failed to produce any movement from the Government on the main issues that concern members.

Therefore the General Secretary recommended that the union should now plan a recall conference. A resolution for this conference has been agreed by the Executive Council (see page 2). It is essential that all members consider this as well as considering the details of the

pension proposals from the Government.

All branches of the union will be meeting over the next few weeks to debate the pensions issue and vote on the recommendations from the union's executive. **Make sure you attend your meeting.**

In addition a number of other campaigning proposals were agreed by the Executive Council (see page two and three) it is important that all members try to participate in this campaign. The threat to pension rights affects every single member of the Fire Brigade Union. **The threat to pension rights affects you.**



General Secretary Matt Wrack says.

"It is regrettable that we have got to this stage. Nobody wants this fight and it is still possible to resolve this matter. We want serious talks with the government. That was what has been promised by the Government and that is what we expect.

In the meantime I urge all FBU members to join in this campaign. There are many things you can do to support the campaign (see page 3). If there is a call for industrial action I urge all members to participate in the vote and to vote **Yes.**"

Recall Conference 16th February EC Emergency Resolution

Conference condemns the continuing attacks on the Pension and related rights of Firefighters. Government proposals for the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) and for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) will detrimentally affect the rights of all FBU members. Their proposals will mean:

- Worsening the arrangements for ill-health retirements (not due to service);
- Altering the arrangements for those forced to retire because of an injury received in the course of duty;
- Altering the age at which many members would be able to retire.

In addition, the Government's plans for an entirely new FPS for new entrants will have the affect of creating a two tier workforce in the UK Fire Service. In particular this will treat those women and members of Black Minority Ethnic communities, who the Government set targets to recruit, as second class employees. The proposed new FPS would force Firefighters to work for much longer before being able to receive a full pension. These proposals are based on a view of Fire Service work which is completely untested.

Conference notes that the Government has not yet published their final proposals for a new compensation scheme and that members of the FPS are being expected to accept changes to their pension and related rights without being provided with the full details of all such proposals.

Conference reaffirms the view of the FBU that Firefighters working the Retained Duty System and Firefighters (Control) should be fully included within the Firefighters Pension Scheme and be granted the same arrangements as current members.

Conference notes that members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme and of the Local Government Pension Scheme are facing far worse treatment than other workers within the Public Sector. In Health, Education and the Civil Service, trade unions were offered lifetime protection for all existing members. Similar arrangements were made for the Police. No such offer has been made to workers within the Fire Service or Local Government.

There are several trade unions representing these workers, who number hundreds of thousands. The FBU has supported and will continue to support a joint campaign with other trade unions to defend the pension rights of all public sector workers as far as possible.

Despite attempts to win concessions from the Government the proposals have not been altered in relation to the major issues identified above. Therefore Conference agrees to immediately commence a ballot of all members for discontinuous strike action. Conference agrees that every effort should be made to coordinate any strike action with other trade unions.

Make sure your Branch discusses and votes on this resolution

Dave Collingwood, Crew Manager, Bransholme, Humberside

"This is a fight we cannot shy away from. It is not about a few quid a week or having a moan when petrol goes up a couple of pence. This is about the difference between enjoying your retirement and having to find another job to make ends meet. Anyone who doesn't think it affects them had better look a little deeper into the proposals. I would rather lose a few hundred quid taking strike action than lose thousands throughout my retirement."

Building our campaign Working with other unions

The FBU has been meeting and discussing with seven other unions on the issue of pensions. The two schemes still under attack are the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The LGPS involves over a million and a half. The FBU is keen to coordinate our campaign with these other unions as far as possible. This may include balloting for action at the same time and coordinating any industrial action. At meetings throughout the UK, members have endorsed this approach.

The other unions involved are **UNISON, TGWU, AMICUS, UCATT, NAPO, and CYWU.**

What you can do

- Ensure your branch meets – All branches should meet over the next few weeks. Ensure you attend and vote.
- Write to your MP – Model letters will be made available through your local FBU officials
- Lobby your MP – The FBU will be arranging lobbies of Parliament over this issue in the coming weeks. Please try to attend.
- Write to the press – Local papers will be very interested in the views of their firefighters on this issue.

"We joined the Pension Scheme in the knowledge that, even though we have to pay over 11% of our salaries into it, we would be afforded the necessary & appropriate recompense & benefits that reflects the job we do. It is morally corrupt to change the rules when we have kept to our side the bargain. The Government is playing politics with the lives & future financial security of Firefighters, Emergency Fire Control Operators & our families. We must fight this injustice"

A Scottish Firefighter

"The disgraceful attacks on our pensions are being pushed forward by hypocritical politicians who have no understanding of our job and no regard for social justice. Our Members signed up to a pension scheme that was offered to them when they first joined the service and have paid a substantial amount of their earnings on the basis of the rules that we all agreed to. Our part of the deal was to commit to the F&RS, be skilled at our job, risk our lives in order to save others and then use a large part of our earnings to secure the pension that was offered to us. We have lived up to these commitments only to find that people in power can now unilaterally tear up our pension, destroy our plans for the future and pull up the ladder for future generations. If there was any real justice these people would be before the courts for willful neglect. The reasons they are putting forward are nothing short of excuses; They say that there is a "black hole" in funding and then propose spending £5 billion on I.D cards! And what happened to the money we have put in? They are either deliberately destroying our scheme or they are incompetent; either way why should it be that our Members are the ones being punished?

The hypocrisy of the current situation is truly galling when at the same time as politicians praise us as heroes at incidents like Buncefield and 7/7 these same people are deliberately and knowingly destroying our future. Isn't it a desperate irony that our Members in the RDS are praised publicly and loudly by people who are fighting tooth and nail in the courts to deny them the same pension as their WT colleagues?. It would seem that "heroes" don't deserve pensions.

We now know that if we want justice we must fight for it. I am proud to be a member of the only Union who is willing to stand up and be counted on this issue and I know that we must now stand together as a collective group to demand justice. The SW FBU is made up of Members in every duty system, Officers, Retained, Wholetime and Control; and we are all affected. Every one of us needs to unite in a campaign for pension justice in order to secure a future that we and our families deserve."

Tam McFarlane
Regional Secretary
South West FBU

Tam Mitchell, Executive Council member for members working the Retained Duty System

"The employers have had the Fire Service on the cheap for years, by refusing to invest in recruitment and training for the Retained side of the service. They have had the Fire-fighters Pension Scheme on the cheap, by refusing one third of Firefighters in the United Kingdom entry to the scheme, on the pretext that the job is not the same or broadly similar.

As Firefighters, we are mobilised to the same incidents on the same appliances to be faced with the same risks, regardless of duty systems - after all a house fire in the centre of Glasgow is no different to a house fire in rural Carlisle.

The FBU has fought for the rights of retained firefighters for many years. It is the Fire Brigades Union which has invested a great deal of money in mounting a legal challenge for the pension rights of Firefighter working the retained duty system. Why is it then that currently retained Firefighters who are not eligible to be members of the existing scheme will we be able, in April 2006, to join the new scheme with less attractive benefits, and an injury pension which will possibly be limited to your Brigade earnings? Discounting the fact you may not be able to return to your main employment, this will do nothing for recruitment and retention. The Firefighters Pension scheme should be left alone and in the interest of fairness and justice open to all.

I urge all retained members to support the union's campaign and if necessary to vote Yes in a ballot for industrial action."

- Ensure your branch has good contacts with the local media – Further advice on this will be issued by FBU Head Office.
- Build links with other trade unions in your area.
- Start to discuss the campaign with friends and family. You will find that local campaigners are keen to support us in this fight.

Political Campaigning

The Fire Brigades Union has Parliamentary Group. This is a group of MPs who work closely with the union to raise issues and ask questions on our behalf. At a recent meeting the General Secretary and President discussed

with the group what political lobbying and campaigning they can engage in on the pensions issue. The union is currently preparing briefings which will then be circulated to all Members of Parliament. The group can assist with lobbying of parliament and are available for advice on other lobbying questions.

The Group will ensure that other trade union groups of MPs are informed of our campaign. The Group is seeking a formal meeting with the Minister (Phil Woolas) to raise concerns about the treatment of Firefighters over pensions.

HOW DO THESE PROPOSALS AFFECT YOU?

One difficulty facing FBU members in considering the proposal for pensions is that the Government are attempting to introduce the changes in stages. In a number of areas the final proposals from the Government are not published. However, they intend to introduce change from April 2006 and the union needs to work towards that deadline.

The next issue of the Firefighter Pension Special will include detailed examples of how the Government's proposals will affect individual cases.

Injury Pensions – Compensation Scheme

Injury Pension within the FPS are paid to members who are forced to retire as a result of a 'due to service' injury. The injury pension provisions are based on length of service and the degree of disablement.

The tax regime for pensions changes in April 2006 and the injury pensions need to be removed from the Pension Scheme itself. The Government intends to introduce a new Compensation Scheme which will include the current injury provisions as well as the compensation currently included within the Grey Book.

The Office of the deputy Prime Minister has been promising detail of these proposals for many months. They are still not published.

The ODPM have also made it clear that they then intend to consider the compensation arrangements for the future, i.e. they intend to change the current

arrangements. Again, no details of these proposals have yet been published.

Ill-Health pensions

Members of the FPS who retire as a result of ill-health (not due to a service injury) currently receive an ill health pension. This is based on length of service and includes enhancements to the pension of the individual.

For example, any member with more than 13 years service receives an enhancement of 7/60 in the event of being awarded an ill-health pension.

The Government proposal is to introduce a two tier scheme for ill-health retirements. Members who can do no work at all will receive an enhanced pension (as yet not published). Those who can do other work (for 30 hours a week) will receive a pension **but will not receive any enhancement.** The effect of this proposal will be generally to reduce ill-health pension.

For example, any member with 13 years or more service would see their pension reduced by 7/60th of average pensionable pay. For a current competent Firefighter that amounts to a reduction of approximately £3,000.

Retirement Age

The intention of the Government is to increase the minimum retirement age from 50 to 55. This would have the effect of forcing many members to work for longer. Members required to work longer could accrue pension above the normal maximum of 40/60. However, compared with the current arrangement such members would previously have been entitled to a pension worth 2/3 of their salary. In other words they will be working for 1/3 of their salary.

What about the local government scheme?

The most serious proposal affecting the Local Government Pension Scheme (which Control members are part of) is the abolition of the Rule of 85. This allows members of the scheme to retire at 60 if age and length of service combined make 85. This proposal will force members of the LGPS to work for longer.

The FBU believes that Control members should be able to join the Firefighters Pension Scheme. We are also opposed to any worsening of the LGPS.



FBU President Ruth Winters says:

"These proposals from the Government will worsen the pension rights of FBU members. It is disgraceful that members' pension rights can be altered without agreement. FBU members have kept their side of the bargain and have paid their way. Now the Government is re-writing the rules. It is unfair and it is unacceptable. I urge all members to support our campaign on this vital issue."