



FIRE BRIGADES UNION
SERVICE ★ STRUGGLE ★ SOLIDARITY

Matt Wrack General Secretary

Fire Brigades Union
Head Office
Bradley House
68 Coombe Road
Kingston-upon-Thames
Surrey KT2 7AE
0208 541 1765
office@fbu.org.uk
www.fbu.org.uk
@fbunational

Circular: 2015HOC0561MW

To: ALL MEMBERS

19 October 2015

Dear Brother/Sister

TRADE UNION BILL: AN ATTACK ON YOUR RIGHTS; EVIDENCE FROM THE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

The Conservative government has introduced a Bill to make further changes to the law governing trade unions. This draft legislation is a serious attack on the rights of all workers, including firefighters. The Bill has recently been considered by a House of Commons Bill Committee and this included taking evidence about matters relating to the Fire and Rescue Service and the FBU.

Undermining workers' rights - to enable further attacks on jobs pay and conditions

The Trade Union Bill includes a number of proposals which would undermine trade union rights. In addition to the proposals in the Bill, the Conservative government is also proposing various other changes which would have a similar impact.

The reason for these latest proposals should be clear. The Cameron government has already announced a further **four years of pay restraint** in the public sector; they are currently considering a further round of **funding cuts** which would decimate jobs and services; they intend (in England) to try to push the Fire & Rescue Service under the control of **Police and Crime Commissioners**; and they intend to push **privatisation** as far as possible in our public services. In order to force through these attacks, they wish to undermine our ability to organise and campaign through our unions. Much of their attack is focussed on trying to undermine union finances or our ability to take industrial action. (Please note: these changes will not apply in Northern Ireland, which will not be covered by this legislation). This list does not cover *all* the proposals. Further details can be found on the FBU website:

The measures include:

- New powers for the Certification Officer to force unions to pay into a levy to fund the work of the Certification Officer.
- New powers of the Certification Officer to demand additional information; to investigate trade unions and to impose fines.

Contd/2...

- Attacking unions' campaigning by altering the arrangements for our political finds - from opt-in to opt-out - to try to reduce union finances.
- Extending the period required for unions to give notice to employers of industrial action from one week to two.
- Limiting the validity of industrial action ballots to four months.
- In the public sector, ending the current voluntary arrangements for paying union contributions by deduction from salary - to try to reduce union finances.
- New threshold requirements for industrial action requiring a minimum 50% turnout in any ballot. At the same time the government has refused to agree systems to increase participation through modern forms of balloting such as online/electronic or workplace.
- Additional thresholds in 'important' public services (including Fire and Rescue) requiring 40% of the total workforce to vote Yes. This means a union just meeting the first threshold would need an 80% Yes vote for action to be lawful.
- Enabling employers to use agency workers to replace workers on strike even if all other balloting requirements have been met.

Firefighters under particular attack

FBU members may be surprised to learn that our union has come under particular focus as part of these attacks. On Thursday October 15 the House of Commons Bill Committee heard evidence on the Trade Union Bill relating to the Fire and Rescue Service. This included evidence from the London Fire Brigade Commissioner Ron Dobson and from myself as the FBU General Secretary.

You can find the evidence from **Ron Dobson** (3rd sitting 15.10.2015) and from **Matt Wrack** (4th sitting 15.10.2015) at:

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/tradeunion/committees/houseofcommonspublicbillcommitteeonthetradeunionbill201516.html>

You can also watch the evidence sessions on Parliament TV.

- For **Ron Dobson** watch from 12.01 at:
<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/3397fbbb-ccd4-48ac-ae0d-2ee72d27690b>
- For **Matt Wrack** watch from 14.33 at:
<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/82811eec-114a-41f6-a70e-abd60c6d3c67>

FBU London dispute 2010

FBU members will note from the evidence that a number of criticisms are made of activities (or alleged activities) by FBU members, in particular relating to our dispute in London in 2010. This dispute arose because the London Fire Brigade, in an attempt to enforce compulsory shift changes, started the process of *dismissing the entire uniformed workforce* in order to force them onto new, imposed contracts.

Contd/3...

In giving evidence on behalf of the union, I attempted to put the 2010 dispute into context and corrected some of the inaccurate impressions which had been made in earlier evidence. It is of note that a dispute involving FBU members is being cited as a one of the reasons why these legislative changes are needed but that this is based on a significantly flawed account of what actually happened and why the dispute arose in the first place.

It is important that FBU members play our part alongside the rest of the trade union movement, in resisting these attacks on our organisation and our ability to campaign. Details of what can be done can be found on the FBU website. The union will also be writing to the Bill Committee to clarify the issues raised in the evidence session.

Best wishes

Yours fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Wrack', with a stylized, cursive script.

MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY

MW/sll