

FireFighter

Trade Union Magazine of the Year

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

May 2010

TRAGIC LOSS

Double death of firefighters
touches the entire service
See p4



Alan Bannon and James Shears: a



I am sure that all members of the FBU will have been thinking of the terrible tragedy in Southampton, where our members Alan Bannon

and James Shears were killed on 6 April.

I know that the thoughts of our members will have been with the families and friends of Alan and James. I know that members from across the UK have been donating to the fund established for the families of Alan and James. I know that our members locally and elsewhere will do whatever they

can to provide support and assistance to those affected. Yet we also know that whatever we do cannot make up for the loss suffered by two families.

I visited Southampton after the fire and was able to meet local members and FBU officials as well as the chief officer and other service managers. It was clear to me that Brothers Bannon and Shears were highly regarded as experienced and committed firefighters.

Our job now is to provide support to the families and to begin the process of investigating the incident to try to learn lessons from it. Our aim, as always, must

be to try to prevent a repetition.

These two fire service deaths rightly attracted national interest from the media. Unfortunately, this interest from the media rapidly fades and moves on to other issues. The long-term impact is not considered. The need for learning lessons is not addressed or followed up.

Are the lessons being learned?

In these circumstances it falls to the FBU to campaign to ensure that lessons are genuinely learned and improvements made where necessary. It is a tragic fact that the FBU is the body in the UK

Contents

Features

10 POLITICS IS IMPORTANT

The FBU is not affiliated to a political party, but its work with MPs is vital for members

14 TAX AND CUTS: THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

Collect the tax owed and avoided by the wealthy and there would be an alternative to public sector cuts

16 EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

How the FBU is equipping local and regional officials to deal with the growing range of issues facing the union and its members

Regulars

4 NEWS

Southampton deaths; Surrey cuts; Tayside victory; Norman McArdle; Norfolk challenge to politicians

5 SOUNDING OFF

Parliamentarians in England and Scotland back fire-safe cigarettes

7 NEWS FOCUS

Equality: Gap between what Conservative Party says and does

8 VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

FBU in unique joint venture to produce safety publication

18 HEALTH

Dealing with back pain at work

19 LEGAL BEAGLE

Blacklisting; "fit notes"

20 DAY OFF

Meet kitesurfer Robin Goodlad

22 PUZZLE PAGE

Your chance to win a Kärcher pressure washer and patio cleaner

23 STATION CAT

The news they don't want you to hear

24 25-YEAR BADGES



Equality: Do fine words mean more than actions?



There is an alternative to public sector cuts

JUSTIN TALLIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

devastating tragedy in Southampton

with the most experience in the fire and rescue service of investigating fatalities. This places a very serious responsibility on our shoulders and, in particular, on those local officials who are given the task of carrying out a health and safety investigation in such circumstances.

It has also fallen to the FBU to highlight the importance of this issue. You will recall that in November 2008 we published our report *In the line of duty: firefighter deaths in the UK since 1978*. That same November, 1,000 FBU members attended a lobby of parliament calling for the concerns outlined in the

report to be addressed by government and by the fire and rescue service.

We have made some limited progress since then. There are new procedures for developing and introducing operational guidance. Clearly this is an essential aspect of our profession and we welcome these steps. Indeed, it was a scandal that this issue was neglected for so long.

However, the matter cannot rest there. We continue to face attempts to undermine the importance of emergency intervention within our service. This approach claims that preventive activities are more important

than emergency intervention. This is a one-sided and dangerous approach. Instead, we want to see a genuinely integrated and modern service. Yes – one which attempts to prevent fires from happening but which also recognises the unique dangers that arise from fire and therefore places emergency intervention right at the heart of fire service activity.

By genuinely learning lessons – and then implementing them – we can truly pay tribute to Alan and James and to all our members killed at work in recent years.

Matt Wrack



8

FBU in unique joint venture to produce safety publication

Get your copy

Not getting your own copy of *Firefighter* at home? Make sure you have informed your brigade secretary of any recent change of address



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JOHN STILLWELL/PA PHOTOS

May 2010

→ Latest news

→ Sounding off

→ In brief

CHRIS SON/PA PHOTOS



Alan Bannon



James Shears

A resident of Shirley Towers in Southampton looks across at the charred building

Firefighters die at tower block fire

HAMPSHIRE

Firefighters are mourning the deaths of two of our brothers, James Shears and Alan Bannon, who were killed last month attending a high-rise fire in Hampshire.

The fire broke out on an upper floor of the 15-storey Shirley Towers in Southampton shortly after 8pm on 6 April. All residents living in the block of flats were successfully rescued or evacuated by the firefighters at the scene.

A total of 20 fire appliances were mobilised to the incident, including red watch from St Mary's fire station. During firefighting operations Alan Bannon and James Shears were killed, while other firefighters required hospital treatment after suffering injuries.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "Firefighters across the UK will be devastated by the loss of two colleagues. Our thoughts are with their families. Firefighters

MEMORIAL FUND ESTABLISHED

The Fire Brigades Union has set up a memorial fund which will include trustees from the union, Hampshire fire and rescue service and St Mary's fire station, to assist our members' families in this terrible time of need.

Anyone who would like to send a donation in their memory can send it direct to:

Name of fund: James Shears & Alan Bannon Memorial Fund

Name of bank: Unity Trust Bank

Account number: 20111678

Sort code: 08-60-01

Anyone who wishes to send a donation by cheque can do so by making the cheque out to "James Shears & Alan Bannon Memorial Fund" and sending it to the following address:

For the attention of Paul Sheppard
St Mary's Fire Station, St Mary's Road,
Southampton SO14 0BJ

work extremely closely together and share challenges and dangers. Losing a colleague is something that touches everyone and that

firefighters never get over."

Wrack went to Southampton to meet local firefighters immediately after the deaths became known.

Hampshire FBU has opened a book of remembrance. Tributes to the two men have been made nationally and locally, as well as on Facebook and other websites.

Ricky Matthews, FBU regional secretary, said: "The union has put a team together to assist with our investigation. This includes drawing in the support of experienced officials from other Fire Brigades Union regions.

"FBU local officials will be involved and the union will provide legal assistance where appropriate. All members are asked to cooperate in what will be an extremely difficult process."

He added: "The union's main aim in this process is to uncover the causes so as to prevent reoccurrence of a similar tragedy and enable the families to understand the events that led to this terrible loss."

Cutting to the bone

SURREY

At least five fire stations in Surrey could lose a quarter or more of their wholetime crew, according to plans seen by the FBU. Surrey already has one of the lowest proportions of firefighters per head in England and only half the retained staff necessary for 24/7 cover. The FBU fears that further cuts will put both firefighters and the public at greater risk.

Richard Jones, Surrey FBU brigade secretary, said: "We've reached a point now where fire crews are turning up at scenes of emergency and having to tell the public that we cannot make a rescue because we have to wait for more staff to turn up. It's life or death in the fire services. If these cuts continue the Grim Reaper will be taking up residence in Surrey."

Proposed cutbacks include up to 60 job losses, closing fire stations and reducing the number of fire engines across the county.

Plans to reduce crewing levels to four, plus new shift patterns and a new response time standard will mean firefighters taking longer to arrive at fires and put safety at risk. Yet Surrey has one of the highest proportions of senior managers in England and is creating more senior roles.

Surrey FBU is working with Unison and GMB trade unions in local government to oppose the cuts. Unions organised a successful lobby in March to press the case.

Jones told the lobby: "If these cuts go through, it will mean the loss of fire engines and station closures. Councillors say they are 'trimming the fat'. However, the fat went years ago and they have been gnawing on the bones ever since."



Firefighters and friends marched on 20 March

Downgrade thwarted again

TAYSIDE

The threatened downgrading of Balmossie fire station in Tayside has been rejected by the local fire board for the second time in a year, after an FBU-led campaign.

Last year proposals were made to change the station from two-pump wholetime/retained to a one-pump 12-hour wholetime daytime cover and one pump 12-hour retained night time cover, and to introduce a 12-hour wholetime daytime cover pump at a two-pump retained station in Forfar.

The proposal was rejected overwhelmingly

by the fire board following a campaign run by the personnel of both stations, which included over 1,500 public response letters opposing the changes.

Yet in November 2009 the fire board included the same proposal in its *Towards a Safer Tayside* document.

A committee was set up, coordinated by retired firefighter Ed Thompson and assisted by personnel from both stations. Firefighters organised letter signing events at shopping centres. More than 5,100 letters opposing the proposal were collected.

The campaign culmi-

nated in a 400-strong march through Broughty Ferry. A rally was addressed by FBU general secretary Matt Wrack and other officials, local MPs Stewart Hosie and Jim McGovern, and local Labour councillors.

A fire board meeting on 29 March voted down the proposal again.

Ronnie Costello, Tayside FBU brigade secretary, said: "With the commitment and hard work of the campaigners coupled with the overwhelming support of the public we were able to fight off this ridiculous attempt to downgrade a very valued and high performing station."

Sounding off!

ANDY DARK

FBU assistant general secretary

Firefighters back MP's call for safer cigarettes

For some time now the Fire Brigades Union has called for legislation to enhance fire safety in the manufacture of cigarettes.

A change in the law at EU level could save hundreds of lives a year. Cigarette fires are the biggest cause of fire-related deaths in the home. In 2005, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 82 deaths, 1,064 injuries and 3,000 accidental home fires were caused by smoking materials, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Every three days someone dies in a fire caused by a cigarette.

Safer cigarettes will not eliminate the danger, but will increase the likelihood that cigarettes will go out before causing a fire.



Andy Dark:

Reduced ignition propensity, or fire-safer, cigarettes use ultra-thin concentric bands in the cigarette paper to restrict oxygen to the burning end of the cigarette.

On 17 March, a motion (S3M-5985) was put down in the Scottish parliament by Stewart Maxwell MSP and six days later Kelvin Hopkins MP put down an early day motion (1150) at Westminster. The motions call on the government to take action to reduce the number of deaths, injuries and properties damaged from cigarettes through legislation on fire safety in cigarette design.

The Fire Brigades Union, the voice of the real professionals in the fire and rescue service, continues to press for the highest standards in the fire service and in industry irrespective of the demands for cuts and "no interference" by the likes of the CBI or, in this case, some strong voices within the tobacco industry. We urge members to press the issue with their MP, MSP and AM and with councillors, fire authority/board members and with chief fire officers.

→ Links to the motions:

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=40792&SESSION=903>
www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions (Look for motion 5985)

In brief

◆ A report by a parliamentary select committee shows that FiReControl should be abandoned, the FBU argues. The Communities and Local Government (CLG) committee report, published last month, set out six conditions for continuing with FiReControl. The union believes they cannot be met. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "The report supports our long-held view that public money is being wasted and public safety compromised. The select committee sets out six conditions for the continuance of the project, and in our view these conditions cannot be met, so the project must be abandoned. Firefighters, who are surely the key stakeholders, have not been consulted. When they have, nonetheless, offered their opinion, it has routinely been ignored. Politicians with no knowledge or experience have taken technical decisions which they were not competent to take, and have not bothered to ask those who know. The FBU and anyone else with any understanding of this project knows that there WILL be further delays, just as there have been delays throughout the history of the project."

◆ The Flood and Water Management Act, which implements many of the findings of the Pitt review of the 2007 floods, became law on 8 April. The Act creates new responsibilities for managing flood risk in England and Wales. Unitary and county councils will bring together the relevant bodies and have a duty to cooperate to develop strategies for managing local flood risk. Although the new law is an improvement on previous arrangements, the FBU argues that government missed an opportunity to implement a duty on fire and rescue services to respond to flooding – a key recommendation of the Pitt review.

◆ The London Fire Brigade said last month that employers and landlords had to pay over £1 million in fines last year for safety breaches, under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. This is a record since the law was changed in 2006. Firefighters carried out 14,000 fire inspections in London last year. With so many employers failing to risk assess premises, train staff, clear fire exits and install alarms, the FBU wants to know why more firefighters are not employed to inspect and enforce the law.

PHIL NIGBY / CUMBRIA NEWSPAPERS



In memory of Norman McArdle

CUMBRIA

FBU members, family and friends paid tribute to Norman McArdle, the Cumbria retained firefighter and social worker who died suddenly in March.

Norman suffered a heart attack in his car after attending a fire service fitness check. He was 60. His wife Lynn was told her husband had died of coronary thrombosis.

Norman became a retained firefighter in 1982 and was a crew manager at Maryport fire station. He also worked for Cumbria county council as a rehabilitation officer for the visually impaired.

Around 80 firefighters attended the funeral, lining the path to the church while a fire appliance led the funeral cortege.

Friends and family spoke of Norman's mischievous sense

of humour, his devotion to his work and his love of Everton football club.

Mally Hind, Cumbria FBU brigade secretary, said: "Local FBU officials have been involved in an investigation surrounding Norman's death."

"On behalf of FBU members in Cumbria, I would like to pass on our sincere condolences to his wife and family over this tragic event."

Donations to the "Norman McArdle Memorial Fund" can be made to:

Name of fund: Norman McArdle Memorial Fund

Name of bank: Unity Trust Bank

Account number: 33029647

Sort code: 08-60-01

Cheques can also be sent to:

The Fire Brigades Union

Regional Office,

The Lighthouse,

Lower Mersey Street,

Ellesmere Port CH65 2AL

FBU's cuts challenge to politicians

NORFOLK

The Fire Brigades Union has written to all candidates of leading political parties in Norfolk, asking them to pledge to oppose planned cuts in the county's fire and rescue service.

Norfolk FBU secretary Jamie Wyatt said: "These cuts will put every citizen in Norfolk at greater risk than at present. They will make 999 response times slower, and they will certainly mean that people will die in fires who could otherwise have been saved, because firefighters and their equipment cannot get there in time."

"Any politician who cares about the safety of the people of Norfolk will give us the pledge we are asking for."

The proposed cuts include:

◆ The loss of eight vital fire appliances

- ◆ Reduction of fire cover to Yarmouth and Norwich areas
- ◆ Cuts to vital frontline fire service resources
- ◆ Fewer frontline firefighters, while numbers of office staff have grown every year for the past decade.

These proposals have been put to the councillors before an integrated risk management plan (IRMP) has been completed. The IRMP is designed to gather evidence on risk. It would identify what demands are likely to be made on the fire service and what resources the service needs to meet them.

Wyatt said: "If councillors make cuts without seeing the IRMP, it indicates that their motives can only be financial and they do not care about risk. If these proposals go ahead, they will compromise the safety both of our communities and of firefighters."



Firefighters on a Pride march in London in 2007

Equality: Who's the best?

Pat Carberry, secretary to the FBU's national gay and lesbian committee, examines the track record of the Tory party and its leadership on supporting legislative change for equality

LGBT RIGHTS

We all know that the Labour government has not lived up to expectations on many of the values that we as trade union members would expect. However, when it comes to promoting equality and improving the lives of millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people, it has delivered.

Since Labour's victory in the 1997 election, LGBT people have witnessed a renaissance period in the advancement of equal rights. Some may view the changes as an introduction of gay rights, but the reality is that they are equal rights and about ensuring that people's sexual orientation or gender identity is not used as a reason to abuse or discriminate against them.

The Conservative Party is going to great lengths to get the message out that it is a

KEY CHANGES SINCE 1997

- 2000** An equal age of consent
- 2000** Lifting of the ban on lesbians and gays serving in the military
- 2002** The right for same sex couples to adopt
- 2003** Prohibition of homophobic discrimination in the workplace
- 2003** Repeal of the homophobic Section 28 (Tory law introduced in 1988)
- 2004** Gender Recognition Act
- 2005** Civil partnerships
- 2006** Prohibition of discrimination in provision of goods and services
- 2008** Homophobia made a hate crime
- 2008** Lesbian fertility rights
- 2010** Equality Act

modern party that embraces and values equality. But should we believe them? My mother once gave me a piece of advice: "Don't judge a person by what they tell you but by what they do." That advice has proved of value to me. And a look at the Conservative record on voting on equality legislation shows that the party's claims do not add up.

David Cameron last year apologised for the Conservatives' introduction of Section 28 – a law prohibiting the "promotion" through education in schools of same-sex

relationships as normal. This is from a man who in 2001 described the repeal of Section 28 as a "fringe issue" and who has consistently voted in opposition – up to and including its repeal. On same-sex couples adopting, he has stated: "I support gay adoption", yet has voted against gay adoption twice.

Under Cameron all but five Tory MPs voted in opposition to the first reading of a parliamentary Bill outlawing incitement to homophobic hatred. On the second reading all Tory MPs voted in opposition, with the exception of John Bercow, now speaker of the House of Commons.

Cameron tried to submit a wrecking amendment to legislation that is now the Equality Act 2010. On the second reading 141 Tory MPs voted against, then 140 Tory MPs voted against the programming of the Bill. Cameron and 129 Tory MPs voted against a carry-over motion for the Bill (a carry-over motion, approved by the House of Commons, allows a Bill that has not received royal assent to resume its progress in the following parliamentary session without having to start from the beginning).

Based on the facts, instead of the fiction being talked, might equality become a victim of the Conservatives? We shall see and be ready for the fight.

FBU promotes fire safety

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION AND FIRE AND SECURITY ASSOCIATION COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE FIRE SYSTEMS STANDARDS

Firefighters know what happens when employers, landlords and homeowners fail to install the right fire detection and fire alarm systems in their buildings: destruction and death.

As a result, the Fire Brigades Union has worked with the Fire and Security Association (FSA), part of the Electrical Contractors' Association, to publish a short guide to the British Standard for the design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems for buildings.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "With 45,000 members, the FBU is by far the largest representative body of uniformed fire and rescue service staff, including those who

'The FBU is committed to securing the highest standards to best ensure the safety of the public and firefighters'

have responsibility for the enforcement of fire safety legislation in occupied buildings.

"The FBU is committed to securing the highest standards to best ensure the safety of the public and firefighters. For that reason, the FBU is pleased to be associated with the production and distribution of this short guide."

The FBU works closely with a number of organisations to promote high standards of fire protection and prevention. But a joint venture on a publication such as this is unique.

The guide is a bespoke FBU redrafting of one of the FSA's existing guides in the highly acclaimed FSA short guide series, which are distributed free of charge to all FSA and ECA member companies.

It was issued to all members of the FBU with April's *Firefighter* to improve awareness of the appropriate standard for fire detection and alarm systems.

Stefan Hay, head of the FSA, said: "The FSA is honoured to have been given the opportunity to work and consult with the Fire Brigades Union to produce this short guide."





London firefighters
tackle a school blaze

JOHN STILLWELL/PA PHOTOS



WHAT DID MPs EVER DO FOR US?

(actually, quite a lot)

The FBU may not be affiliated to a political party, but its political work with MPs remains absolutely vital

The FBU disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 2004 and does not pay any affiliation money to it. However the union remains committed to political campaigning. The fire and rescue service is publicly funded, and we know that political decisions have a huge impact on the service. The union cannot ignore politics; and politics certainly won't overlook the service.

The union currently supports a parliamentary group of 45 MPs, but only 30 are standing for re-election (see box).

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "The FBU parliamentary group's role is to campaign within parliament – and elsewhere – on fire service issues and other matters identified by the union."

Union officials meet MPs regularly to discuss current issues in the service and

to identify work the MPs can undertake to assist the union.

John McDonnell MP, secretary to the FBU parliamentary group, said: "The five years since the last election have not been easy for trade unionists or for public services. Firefighters have seen the impact of so-called 'modernisation' which has been used to cut jobs, reduce the service and attack conditions.

"The FBU parliamentary group has played a key role in challenging the government in relation to attacks on firefighters and the FBU. This has not been popular with the government but our job is to support FBU members and to campaign to defend our fire service."

What MPs do

The FBU's parliamentary group plays an irreplaceable role in the union's campaigning work. MPs work hard to ensure that the

union's interests are represented in parliament and that the union's voice is heard in key debates. The MPs supported by the FBU cannot on their own change the law – they are, after all, a minority within the Labour Party and in parliament as a whole. But they can and do influence the government.

The MPs in the FBU group are "tribunes of the people", speaking out on a wide range of injustices and defending workers' rights. The MPs help the FBU by:

- Supporting FBU members in industrial disputes
- Helping the FBU organise lobbies of parliament
- Asking difficult questions on the floor of parliament
- Obtaining information from government not available elsewhere
- Proposing new laws to protect firefighters

FBU parliamentary group

The FBU Executive Council agreed to support the election campaigns of 30 MPs who have consistently stood by the union over the past five years. The MPs identified have been supportive of campaigns to defend firefighters and our service. There has not been and there will be no national donation to the Labour Party or any other party. Those being supported are:

	Majority
David Anderson MP Blaydon	5,335
Celia Barlow MP Hove	420
Roger Berry MP Kingswood	7,873
Roberta Blackman-Woods MP City of Durham	3,274
Dawn Butler MP Brent South	11,326
Katy Clark MP Ayrshire North and Arran	11,296
Michael Connarty MP Linlithgow and Falkirk East	11,202
Rosie Cooper MP Lancashire West	6,084
Jeremy Corbyn MP Islington North	6,716
Ian Davidson MP Glasgow South West	13,896
Andrew Dismore MP Hendon	2,699
David Drew MP Stroud	350
Robert Ffello MP Stoke-on-Trent South	8,681
Nia Griffith MP Llanelli	7,234
David Hamilton MP Midlothian	7,265
Kate Hoey MP Vauxhall	9,977
Kelvin Hopkins MP Luton North	6,487
Tony Lloyd MP Manchester Central	9,776
Rob Marris MP Wolverhampton South West	2,879
Kerry McCarthy MP Bristol East	8,621
John McDonnell MP Hayes and Harlington	10,847
James McGovern MP Dundee West	5,379
Austin Mitchell MP Great Grimsby	7,654
George Mudie MP Leeds East	11,578
Linda Riordan MP Halifax	3,417
Marsha Singh MP Bradford West	3,026
Dennis Skinner MP Bolsover	18,347
Dari Taylor MP Stockton South	6,139
Joan Walley MP Stoke-on-Trent North	10,036
Mike Wood MP Batley and Spen	5,788

GRAHAM CLARK



KATY CLARK

JOHNNY GREEN/PA PHOTOS



ANDREW DISMORE

STEFANO CAGNONI



JOHN McDONNELL

THE LABOUR PARTY/PA PHOTOS



DAVID DREW

and other workers

- Opposing new laws that hit firefighters and other workers
- Rallying other MPs to support changes in the law
- Arranging meetings with ministers and other MPs.

This role is well illustrated by the MPs' activities in recent years supporting firefighters in parliament.

Firefighter safety

The FBU's parliamentary group of MPs has played a pivotal role in putting firefighter safety on the political agenda. They helped the FBU to organise a lobby of parliament attended by 1,000 firefighters in 2008.

The MPs assisted with the FBU report *In the line of duty*, which showed the dramatic increase in firefighter deaths since modernisation was launched. By asking parliament

how many firefighters had died over the previous 20 years, they provided baseline figures to put recent deaths in context. These figures, not available publicly before then, put the government on the spot about the rise in deaths since 2004.

In November 2008 the group's chair, Andrew Dismore, spoke at the FBU rally before hurrying to the chamber to make the argument at prime minister's question.

Gordon Brown was forced to acknowledge the issue of firefighters' safety and to agree that ministers would meet the union and firefighters' families.

This meeting took place in May 2009, when Dave Faust and Robert Wornham made powerful arguments for lessons to be learned from their sons' deaths on duty. The FBU group gathered over 150 signatures from other MPs pressing the government to act on firefighter safety.

Defending pensions

Pensions are deferred pay and for firefighters, with a much shorter career than other workers, the issue is crucial. David Cameron has threatened to end what he regards as "pensions apartheid", whereby public sector workers get decent pensions. The FBU's parliamentary group has played a key role in defending the firefighter pension scheme, including opposition to government attempts to change the rules to leave ill or injured firefighters without a job or a pension. It organised an early day motion in parliament to raise the issue and helped organise a lobby in 2008 to pressurise the government.

The MPs organised meetings with ministers to put the union's case. After the FBU won a Court of Appeal judgment in April 2009, the MPs asked questions in the House of Commons and helped the union monitor the implementation of the decision.

Exposing regional controls

The FBU's parliamentary group has also played a crucial role in exposing the flawed regional control project.

The MPs rallied support for the union's case by obtaining vital figures on the escalating costs of the project, briefed other MPs and helped the union to organise a hugely successful lobby in October 2009 which was attended by 2,000 firefighters.

The lobby resulted in a parliamentary inquiry earlier this year and gave the union an opportunity to pit our arguments against the backers of the scheme, particularly the Department for Communities and Local Government and Chief Fire Officers Association. At a hearing in February this year FBU general secretary Matt Wrack was able to present the union's case for maintaining local emergency control centres to protect communities and control jobs.

Katy Clark MP, said: "Over the past few years the union and the parliamentary group have developed an effective campaigning system.

"Rather than sponsoring constituencies as some unions do, the FBU is ensuring that firefighters' issues are raised in a systematic way with MPs and government. This can't solve all the problems we face, but it is an essential aspect of political campaigning."

Clark is absolutely right. The MPs have helped the union on a wide range of issues. They have questioned the government to prevent fascist BNP members working in the fire and rescue service and brought to light how many people are rescued by firefighters – figures no longer published in official reports. Whether it is supporting members in industrial disputes – as they did in the recent South Yorkshire dispute – or attending FBU events, these MPs have shown the real value of workers' representation in politics.

With bitter battles ahead against cuts, in

“We will mobilise the widest coalition to protect jobs and the fire service”

defence of pay and pensions, and to improve firefighter safety, the FBU will need their support as much as ever.

John McDonnell MP said: "After the election, the FBU parliamentary group will be even more important, arguing for investment in firefighter and public safety and against further cuts which can only put that safety at risk."

He added: "Working together we will aim to mobilise the widest coalition possible to protect jobs and the fire service."

MPs support FBU floods campaigning

The FBU parliamentary group has supported firefighters demanding the right kit and personal protective equipment (PPE) to tackle flooding safely. In February this year David Drew MP, a member of the FBU group, moved amendments to the government's Flood and Water Management Bill in an attempt to secure a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to major flooding. The FBU believes this is vital for national resilience – otherwise chief officers will be able to cut back on boats, training and equipment when budgets are tight.

The duty is also vital to ensure that firefighters have the right PPE and training to tackle flooding. Drew – whose son-in-law is a retained firefighter – read excerpts from *Firefighter* coverage of the Cumbria flooding in 2009 to illustrate what our members face. Although the amendments were not accepted by the government, the MPs organised a meeting for the union to press our case with ministers. The force of the FBU's case is now widely recognised within and outside the service.



MPs have backed the FBU's campaign for the right kit and PPE to tackle flooding

PETER BYRNE/PA PHOTOS

There is an

Collecting tax owed by the wealthy would fund public services and save jobs

Everyone seems to agree with Tina: There Is No Alternative. The government is spending billions more than it receives in revenue. Tighten your belt. Cut, cut, cut.

This argument is fundamentally wrong because it ignores the wads of cash that are available that could be used to fund public services and save the jobs of firefighters, nurses, teachers and other socially useful workers.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: “Billions have been spent bailing out the bankers and billions of pounds are lost as the wealthy evade and avoid paying tax. Firefighters and other workers should not be paying for a crisis that was not of our making.”

Part of the union alternative to cuts is set out in a recent report by tax expert Richard Murphy for the PCS civil servants union. *Tax justice and jobs: the business case for investing in staff at HM Revenue and Customs* was published in March. Murphy highlights the tax gap that arises because the very wealthy get round paying the taxes they owe.

The tax gap

Tax evasion is the illegal non-payment or under-payment of taxes, usually by making a false declaration or no declaration to tax authorities. If the perpetrator is caught there

are legal penalties. Using data provided by HM Revenue and Customs, Murphy estimates that tax evasion in the UK is not less than £70 billion a year.

Tax avoidance means seeking to minimise a tax bill without deliberate deception, but is contrary to the spirit of the law. Murphy reckons tax avoidance was £25 billion in 2008. This includes the notorious “non-doms” – wealthy people who legally avoid income and capital gains on their international earnings – although their UK income is taxed. A third area of concern is non-payment of tax. UK unpaid tax is currently estimated to be £28 billion. Overall some £123 billion in tax is missing (see box).

The lack of tax revenue did not cause the current financial crisis – reckless bankers and property speculators saw to that. But the lack of tax revenue caused by the current financial crisis is a problem facing

any future government. The recent budget put government borrowing at £163 billion. Richard Murphy said: “What is clear is that the current crisis in government financing is not a spending-related issue: it is a revenue-related issue. It is the collapse in income that has created the problems facing society. If we wish to continue to enjoy the benefits of government spending, the means has to be found to restore government income when a ‘tax gap’ has opened up in the UK.”

How to collect more tax

First, tax evasion and the non-payment of tax due must be addressed. This should be done by increasing the number of tax inspectors to tackle these issues. This makes particular sense during a period of high unemployment. Rather than pay people to go on benefits, the government could employ more tax collectors to bring in money owed, at very low cost – less than £4,000 net per inspector, according to Murphy.

Secondly, challenging tax avoidance is vital. This activity, largely unrecorded by the government and therefore not reflected in its statistics, shifts the burden of tax payment in society from capital onto labour, and from the wealthy and self employed onto employed labour. The result is fiscal injustice.

However the government is going in the wrong direction on tax. It aims to cut the number of tax inspectors by 25,000 – PCS said 17,000 have already left. The government is also closing local tax offices – over 200 offices have either closed already, are about to close,

UK tax gap	
Tax evasion	= £70 bn
Tax avoidance	= £25 bn
Non-payment of tax	= £28 bn
Total	= £123 bn
Source: <i>Tax justice and jobs (PCS 2010)</i>	



other way

JUSTIN TALLIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



A PCS protester with an Alistair Darling mask protests outside parliament

DAVID MANSELL/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Non-dom: Tory Party chairman Michael Ashcroft

GARETH FULLER/PA PHOTOS



Non-dom: Tory candidate Zac Goldsmith

New measures to tackle tax avoidance

In the March budget Chancellor Alistair Darling promised a crackdown on offshore tax dodges by wealthy individuals and large companies which would add an extra £1.5bn to the government's coffers.

He also announced increased penalties on people keeping untaxed wealth in offshore havens and closer scrutiny of companies that "lose" profits offshore and pay less tax.

Measures were outlined to safeguard £4bn of tax receipts that civil servants feared would be unpaid by businesses and individuals using tax avoidance schemes or offshore trusts.

Darling got a cheer for his pledge to crackdown on Belize, one of the world's last bastions of tax secrecy, from where Tory Party chair and major funder Michael Ashcroft conducts his operations.

or are under threat of closure.

The budget in March did promise to crack-down on some tax evaders (see box). However much more could be done. If a sizable chunk of the £123 billion owed was collected, the deficit could be brought down while safeguarding public services and the jobs of fire-fighters and other workers. The fire and rescue service costs only £2 billion by comparison.

This is before other measures to raise

revenue – such as increasing taxes on the wealthy and business, or scrapping expensive mega-projects like Trident and identity cards.

Matt Wrack said: "Far too much is lost in tax not paid by some of the wealthiest individuals and largest corporations in the country. If government policy was seriously directed at addressing this scandal we could see much needed investment in our public services rather than cuts."

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TAX NOT PAID
£123 billion



“Every brigade should send at least one official on the course”

FBU national officer Sean Starbuck explains the union's education plans for the coming year



“I had little knowledge before the course, now I feel empowered to challenge on the issues”

Another added: “The negotiating matrix was extremely useful; also the role play was invaluable.” Reps said they had learned “some new tricks” and that “tutors were excellent and knowledgeable”.

The understanding equality impact assessments (EIA) course ran in February and March and was widely regarded as very useful. The course helps reps understand the duties placed on employers and how the FBU can be involved. One rep said: “The entire course was invaluable. I had little knowledge before the course, now I feel empowered to challenge on the issues.” Another said: “Good, learnt a lot and feel more confident in looking at EIAs and getting involved in the process.”

Forthcoming courses

The course on qualifications and workforce development helps FBU officials representing members in connection with the integrated personal development system (IPDS). The two courses so far this year were well received. There will be one more in June. One participant said: “The course has given me knowledge of IPDS and qualifications in the fire service which will enable me to challenge management.” Another added that he now had “a greater understanding of issues such as competency; appraisal; verification; NVQ assessment; development and pay; ADCs and ITOPs”. One rep said: “100% useful, every brigade should send at least one official on the course.”

Union learning reps (ULRs) are very keen on the promoting and developing learning and organising course, which is coming up in July. Last year one rep said: “The session on understanding dyslexia was enjoyable and informative, I now have an idea how to signpost members with support for learning or dyslexia issues.” Similarly, the pensions and medical update course in September is “very comprehensive and informative” for reps who need to know more about the procedure and running an appeal.

National school 2010

The premier event of the year for the FBU education programme is the national school, which takes place from 7 to 13 November 2010. The event helps officials to improve their skills and increase their confidence to engage in debates covering current fire service employment issues and to understand the work of the National Joint Council and other matters with a wider social and political relevance.

Last year participants said the school was “excellent” because it “gives officials a knowledge of basic politics and issues facing the wider trade union movement”. One rep said: “It raised my political awareness and the importance of looking at the relevance of trade union history.” Participants were inspired by the “awayday” to the mineworkers’ union and the national coal mining museum.

Progress last year

Last year the union organised 22 courses for officials, as well as various sectional schools and the national school 2009, with over 630 places being taken up by officials from across the union. Courses that were well received by officials during the last year included using national and local consultation and negotiating procedures, handling change and restructuring and qualifications and workforce development – a trade union approach.

The union’s courses are delivered with the help of professional trade union education tutors who work as part of the TUC education service. National officials and head office staff contribute to courses as appropriate. All tutors are experienced trade unionists who understand the role of trade union reps and the issues or problems they face. Courses are accredited with the TUC/National Open College Network.

Over the next 12 months the union’s education programme will focus on current priorities for brigade, regional and sectional officials. It is clear that FBU officials are increasingly dealing with a wider range of issues affecting members, especially at brigade level, and many of these issues are connected with challenges arising from the employers’ modernisation agenda.

In some cases officials are also dealing with proposals that need to be made to management on behalf of the union or coming from management arising out of significant changes in legislation, for example the public sector equality duty and the requirement to undertake equality impact assessments.

Progress this year

The FBU is running new or revised courses during this year on bargaining, equalities, integrated risk management planning (IRMP), pensions and using the media (see box). Some schools have already taken place and the feedback has been very positive.

The bargaining skills for brigade and regional officials course took place in January and February this year. It is designed to help officials participate more effectively in negotiations. One participant said: “The course as a whole was extremely beneficial. It is probably the best course I have attended.”

FBU courses in 2010

The FBU is offering new and revised courses this year on:

- Bargaining skills for brigade and regional officials
- Understanding equality impact assessments
- Understanding integrated risk management planning (IRMP) and challenging within the process
- Time management for union officials
- Using the media
- Promoting and developing learning and organising in the UK fire and rescue service
- Introductory fairness and equality at work
- Fairness and equality at work follow-on
- Pensions and medical appeals update 2010
- The national school 2010

For more information about courses, speak to local brigade officials

Worse than a pain in the neck

Dealing with back pain at work

BACK PAIN

Around a quarter of a million workers in the UK suffer from back pain that was caused or made worse by their current or past work, according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the national safety body.

For firefighters, almost half the registered injuries of over three days come from manual handling, lifting or carrying – which contribute to back pain. Back pain is also an issue raised by FBU members and safety reps, even when it is not recorded in official figures.

Legal duties of employers

Fire and rescue authorities/boards have a legal obligation to protect the health and safety of their employees and other people who might be affected by what they do.

Some health and safety regulations are particularly relevant to dealing with back pain in the workplace:

- ◆ Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires that all employers assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees while they are at work.

CAUSES OF PAIN

Back pain can be caused by many work situations. The exact cause is often unclear, but HSE states that back pain is more common in roles that involve:

- ◆ heavy manual labour and handling tasks in heavy industry;
- ◆ manual handling in awkward places like delivery work;
- ◆ repetitive tasks such as manual packing of goods;
- ◆ sitting at a workstation for a long period of time if the workstation is not correctly arranged or adjusted to fit the person – working with computers, for instance;
- ◆ driving long distances or driving over rough ground, particularly if the seat is not, or cannot be, properly adjusted or adequately sprung;
- ◆ operating heavy equipment, such as an excavator;
- ◆ stooping, bending over or crouching (poor posture);
- ◆ pushing, pulling or dragging loads that require excessive force;
- ◆ working beyond normal abilities and limits, and when physically overtired;
- ◆ stretching, twisting and reaching.

- ◆ The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require an employer to carry out a risk assessment on the manual handling tasks that pose a risk of injury.
- ◆ Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (DSE Regulations): some users of visual display units may get aches and pains, including back pain.
- ◆ Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005: regular long-term exposure to whole body vibration (WBV) is associated with back pain.

Consultation

Fire and rescue employers have a legal duty to consult with all employees or elected FBU representatives. FBU safety reps have an important role to play in assisting members with back pain – particularly making sure that risk assessments are carried out and regularly reviewed, logging complaints and helping members off sick with back pain.

Talking to firefighters is important because they know what they find difficult and often have good ideas about how to improve things. Involving workers and safety representatives in discussions about how to improve health and safety will also make it easier to agree changes.

Some people, because of their age and fitness, are more susceptible to back pain than others, so it is important to consult firefighters in the risk assessment process.

Dealing with back pain

HSE advises that rest may not help people suffering from back pain. The back is designed for movement, so the sooner you start doing ordinary activities the better. It advises workers to use painkillers and apply heat or cold to the sore area. A short course of manipulation can help relieve back pain for some, if done by a qualified professional osteopath or chiropractor.

FBU safety reps can assist by getting sufferers on lighter duties or time off to visit specialists. This will help firefighters to get back to work and prevent further pain in the long run.



Computer image of the male musculature based on Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (circa 1492).

More information:
www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain

I think I'm blacklisted

Q I'm a retained member and think my name may be on a blacklist of active trade unionists. I've been involved in a fair bit of industrial action over the years in my main job and I am active in the FBU too. I was made redundant last year and have been unable to get a job interview since. Are blacklists of trade unionists legal and what are my rights?

A Until very recently, blacklisting of trade unionists was not illegal. The government had intended outlawing the practice in the Employment Relations Act 1999 and drew up regulations to do so. But because there was a lack of concrete evidence that blacklisting was still taking place (there was, though, plenty of anecdotal evidence), the regulations were never enacted.

But after it was revealed last year that an organisation called the Consulting Association had files on thousands of construction workers and that over 40 construction companies were using it to vet applicants, the government launched a consultation on outlawing blacklisting.

Regulations making it unlawful to blacklist workers from employment as a result of their union membership or activities came into force on 2 March this year. They give current and former trade union members the right to complain to an employment tribunal if they are refused employment, subjected to a detriment, or unfairly dismissed because their name appears on a blacklist.

Employment agencies are unable to refuse to provide a service to someone who appears on a blacklist.

It is also unlawful to compile, use, sell or supply blacklists containing details of people who are, or have been, trade union members or who are taking part, or have taken part, in trade union activities. Tribunals can award minimum compensation

of £5,000 where the regulations are breached.

While the regulations at least provide some recourse to the law for those who have evidence that they have been blacklisted, they do not make blacklisting a specific criminal offence.

It is therefore likely that some employers and industries will continue to try to get away with operating some sort of covert blacklisting.

Ultimately, if you think that your name may be on a blacklist it will be down to you to prove it and to show that you have been harmed as a result. Speak to your union rep without delay in order to get advice about how to do this and how to pursue a claim if your suspicions turn out to be right.

→ The blacklisting regulations can be found at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100493_en_1

opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20100493_en_1

What is a 'fit note'?

Q I've been off sick on and off for a few months. My GP always gives me a sick note. But recently he said that I would soon need a "fit note" instead. My union rep had not heard of this. What is a "fit note"?

A The traditional sick note, or medical statement, was replaced on 6 April by a new statement known as a statement of fitness for work or "fit note". It means that GPs can advise that patients are either "not fit for work" or that the patient "may be fit for work taking account of the following advice".

The purpose of the note as evidence for claiming sick pay has not changed.

There will be four types of alterations to work that the GP can tick. These are:

- A phased return to work
- Altered hours
- Amended duties
- Workplace adaptations.

GPs will not be able simply to declare someone to be "fit for work". If they think that they are fit for work then the doctor will simply not issue a new medical certificate.

There is also space on the note for the doctor to provide more information on the condition and how it may affect what the patient does. The difficulty with this is that GPs do not need a comprehensive knowledge or understanding of an individual's job or need any occupational health expertise. So suggestions made will be based on the patient's health condition rather than being job-specific.

It is the employer's responsibility to carry out a risk assessment.

Union reps will need to be aware of the implications of the new note as it is vital that it is not used to force workers back to work too early or to accept a pay cut.

The TUC has issued recommendations that union safety reps and stewards should ensure that they have procedures in place to deal with issues that arise as a result of the changes to the medical certificate and which could result in grievances.

It is particularly important that employers' sickness absence arrangements and occupational sick pay schemes are updated where necessary.

→ The TUC's advice to union reps on using the new "fit note" is at: www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-17604-f0.cfm

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

‘That buzz doesn’t stop until you get off’

Shropshire FBU member Robin Goodlad uses his free time to go kitesurfing

Firefighter Robin Goodlad often takes to the water in a wetsuit when he’s off duty, relishing the elements: sea, wind – and sometimes even sunshine. Robin kitesurfs at Aberdovey near to home in West Wales. The main UK kite-surfing season is now under way and more people are discovering the challenges and delights of one of the fastest growing sports in the UK.

Kitesurfing can look effortlessly elegant to the casual onlooker who spots a figure gliding across the water from the beach, powered only by the wind. But when the kitesurfer starts backflipping at 360 degrees in midair, the effortlessly elegant sport morphs into extreme aerobics on water, complete, it seems, with kite.

Robin Goodlad has learned to do impressive-looking feats – including 30-foot jumps in the air and the 360 backloop, as its known – since he took up kite-surfing five years ago.

‘You can land on your face’

Success in performing the backloop comes with practice. “You have to look over your shoulder, spot your landing, and land your board at the precise time,” Robin told *Firefighter*. “If you don’t get it right, you can land on your face, which can be painful.”

All kitesurfers need lessons, said Robin, who was given a course on his thirtieth birthday. Kitesurfing courses have sprung up around the coast to cater for growing demand. Once proficient, the golden rule is never kitesurf alone.

The sport is a combination of kiteflying and boarding – with the rider harnessed to the kite as it captures the wind. The rider’s feet control the board and determine direction when pressure is applied. The wind-filled kite supplies the traction, powering the rider across the surface of the sea.

Conditions have to be right. Wind is a must, of course. But it has to be the right wind – one that’s blowing into the shore not out to sea. Launching off the beach into an offshore wind is likely to blow you

out to sea – so must be avoided at all times, Robin says. He brings a firefighter’s safety consciousness and attention to detail to his chosen sport.

The need to check equipment before turning out will be familiar to any frontline firefighter. Kitesurfers lay out their kite and harness to ensure there are no knots and twists before they set out to sea. Tangles can lead to snapped lines which would be disastrous at sea. Handling the kite incorrectly can lead to “tea-bagging” – when surfers get lifted, dragged and dunked by the excess power of the kite. So it pays to get it right.

Robin has always loved the outdoor life – he worked at an outdoor centre for ten years before joining the fire service in Shrewsbury five years ago. He’s now on red watch at Shrewsbury fire station in Shropshire.





ROBIN GOODLAD

Robin Goodlad works as a firefighter in Shrewsbury and lives and plays as a kitesurfer in Aberdovey, West Wales. He is also an lifeboat volunteer and a senior helmsman for the RNLI



But when he's back home in Aberdovey, a call out can just be a pager bleep away: Robin also volunteers for the RNLI and is a senior helmsman for the local lifeboat. He has helped rescue kitesurfers and other water sports enthusiasts on occasion.

"It's a way of putting something back into the local community, using my knowledge of the sea to help others," said Robin, who hopes he will avoid the embarrassment of being rescued himself.

Those lessons five years ago have proved a very sound investment. "Once you've had your lessons and bought your kit, the wind is completely free," said Robin. "You don't have to pay a penny for club subscriptions or course fees. You can just blow up your kite and off you go" – though never alone, of course.

Kitesurfing is growing in popularity around the world – Portugal's Algarve is a favourite spot for Robin and friends.

But home or away if there's no wind, there's no kitesurfing. Robin's plans to kitesurf with friends in Portugal had to be changed when the weather was just too calm. But when the wind is right and the sun is out, kitesurfers on the Algarve – Robin and friends included – ride the wind without wetsuits, making for a stunningly exhilarating holiday.

It's sometimes necessary to add boots

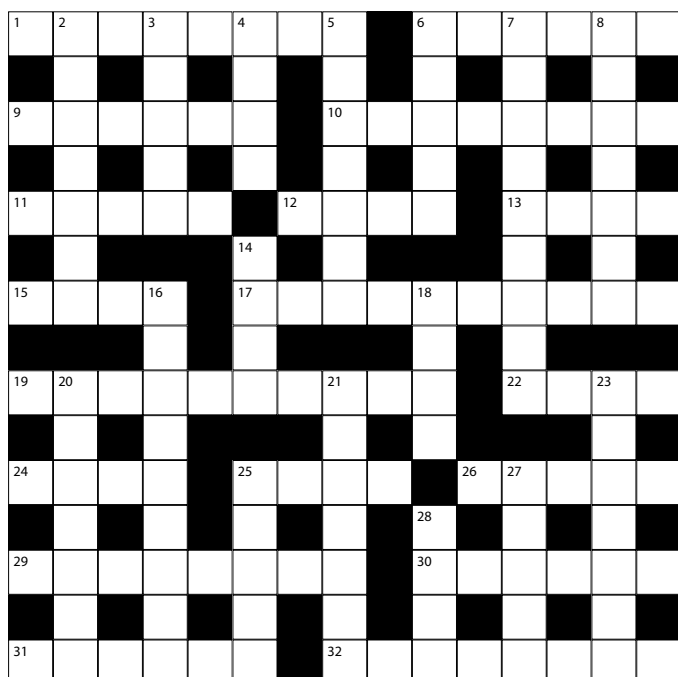
Back in West Wales, (in the winter) it's sometimes necessary to add boots and gloves to the basic kitesurfing kit to keep out the cold. But as long as the wind is right, it can be a sport for all seasons.

It may be an individual not a team sport, but it's very social. "They are a very good crowd round Aberdovey," said Robin, who often takes off ten miles up the coast with a group of friends and kitesurfs back home.

It looks really cool, is highly social and provides a complete body workout that the most rigorous gym programme would be hard put to rival. So it's not surprising that those who master kitesurfing keep coming back for more.

Or as Robin put it: "It's just one of those sports. As soon as the wind starts blowing you've just got to go. You get that buzz – and it doesn't stop until you get off"

Quick Crossword

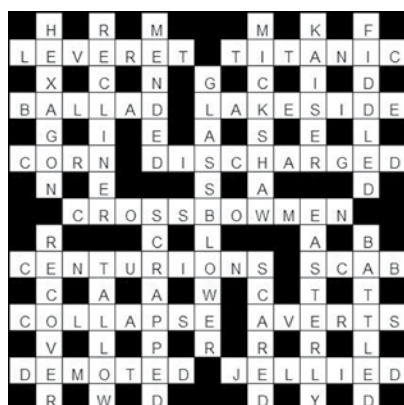


ACROSS

- 1 It falls from the sky (8)
- 6 Spike for kebab, for example (6)
- 9 Liverpool club or big subterranean opening (6)
- 10 Attractive, in a metallic way! (8)
- 11 Animal (5)
- 12 Something freely given (4)
- 13 Incisions – that can cost lives (4)
- 15 Enclose 12 (in paper?) (4)
- 17 Brigade with ignominious record of most job cuts (10)
- 19 Suitable; fit to be received (10)
- 22 It falls from the sky – colder than 1 (4)
- 24 Get drinks in them (or measures of pressure) (4)
- 25 Remain; support (4)
- 26 Headgear, worn by 5, perhaps (5)
- 29 Every two years (8)
- 30 Astonished (6)
- 31 Slap-up meals (6)
- 32 Least bitter (8)

DOWN

- 2 Non-professional (7)
- 3 They go with tatties and haggis (5)
- 4 Alarm bells do this (4)
- 5 French firefighter (7)
- 6 One of the senses (5)
- 7 Tests or demonstrations of physical or mental agility (9)
- 8 Thrown out (7)
- 14 Dirty particle, in smoke for instance (4)
- 16 Game birds (9)
- 18 FBU's leading committee, in short (4)
- 20 Poison (7)
- 21 Hounds (7)
- 23 The first ones to the crease (7)
- 25 Fielders close to 23 (5)
- 27 Precise (5)
- 28 Cook in oven (4)



Solution to April 2010 crossword

Winner of the March 2010 quiz

Paul Rudge of Coventry

Answers to March 2010 quiz

1. B – The Hurt Locker
2. C – Mary Poppins
3. C – Ben Kingsley
4. D – Leona Lewis
5. A – Thunderbolt and Lightfoot

3

TIM SNOO/AP/PA PHOTOS



Prize quiz

Win a Kärcher pressure washer

1. Which northern European country is a volcanic hotspot that caused travel chaos in April?

- a. Iceland
- b. Finland
- c. Sweden
- d. Norway

4. Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed by which volcano in AD79?

- a. Mount Aso (Japan)
- b. Mount Mayon (Philippines)
- c. Vesuvius (Italy)
- d. Hekla (Iceland)

5. Which of the following gases is released into the atmosphere from volcanic eruptions?

- a. sulphur dioxide
- b. chlorine
- c. carbon monoxide
- d. mustard gas

2

FRIEDEL GIERTH/DOA/PA PHOTOS



2. Etna, Europe's largest active volcano, is located on which coast of Sicily?

- a. North
- b. South
- c. East
- d. West

3. Which country has the most volcanos?

- a. Philippines
- b. Indonesia
- c. United States
- d. Italy



4

HOW TO ENTER

To win a Kärcher pressure washer and patio cleaner please send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 May 2010 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May 2010) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Off the rails



Station Cat isn't quite sure, but he thinks there may be a general election on. The clue is that trade unions have become a very sensitive subject on radio and television. Union leaders get a harder-than-usual time and some presenters itch to say "winter of discontent" and "hold the country to ransom" and the rest of the anti-union clichés at regular intervals.

The Today programme's John Humphrys made what, for a broadcaster of his experience, was a crass error. When the courts refused to allow a rail strike because of errors in the ballot process, he referred to the RMT ballot as "rigged" – something no one had suggested in court. **This was so over the top that Humphrys may be forced into a humiliating withdrawal.**

As Labour MP John McDonnell has pointed out: "This ballot was sent out, counted and completely run by the Electoral Reform Society." Even the employers never suggested in court that the ballot was "rigged", only that there were unintentional errors.

Losing it



Humphrys is at least a knarled old professional who can look after himself. Not so Petrie Hosken, a presenter with the London radio station LBC, who seems to have lost it completely when her anti-union rant was challenged on her programme.

She began an item on trade unions with the usual stuff about unions holding the country to ransom, being old-fashioned and being run by "bosses". An invited studio guest explained that unions protected workers against exploitation, and was surprised to hear her reply furiously: **"You're the rudest person I've ever had in my studio."**

Her guest suggested that she ought to join her own union, the National Union of Journalists, which would protect her against her employers, but Ms Hosken said she wasn't going to "answer questions about my personal stuff".

She added furiously: "Maybe you ought to be a union boss" – and was incandescent when her guest took it as a compliment.

As the interview ended, her guest said: "Thank you for inviting me" and the

presenter replied grimly: "It won't happen again."

Now, as it happens, the trade unionist who caused Ms Hosken all this anguish is an old friend of the Cat's, so we know the very strange aftermath.

After he had left the studio, the producer apologised profusely to him for Ms Hosken's hysterical behaviour. And just as the producer was offering his apology, the advertising break ended, and Ms Hosken came back on air, still steaming, still chuntering on about the dreadfully rude man who had dared come on her programme and defend trade unions. Which is the real voice of LBC – Ms Hosken's, or her producer's?

It's all about timing



So it's goodbye, then, Bertha Joseph. Remember her? She's the woman who was banned for six months from sitting as a councillor in Brent; told to repay £900 to the Mayor's Charity to reflect money she had received from Twinstar Motors and Malcolm Butchers; and censured for obtaining cash to sponsor a Mayor's Ball that she subsequently spent on a dress for herself.

Yet London mayor Boris Johnson allowed her to continue being the £19,000-a-year deputy chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA).

Well, Mr Johnson has changed his mind. After weeks of thinking about it, he has apparently decided there is a "compelling case" against her staying in the post.

But he waited until after the vote on the budget – when her vote was crucial in getting his cuts to the fire service agreed.

Len Duvall, the leader of the Labour group on the assembly, said: "This is someone who spent money intended for children's charities on clothes for herself. I'm amazed it took so long for the mayor to decide she was unfit for office."

It's an education



As fire authorities all over Britain confront their fear that they may be making firefighters too comfortable, with places to sleep at night while waiting for emergency calls, and even the occasional pool table or



London firefighters search for survivors in a printworks destroyed by German bombing in 1940

dartboard, the Cat has been looking back at better times.

During the second world war, firefighters waiting for the next German air attack were offered not just pool, but education. In the north of England, the Workers' Educational Association arranged classes for firefighters. In the south, London's City Literary Institute trained 80 firefighters to lead discussions on such subjects as Russia, the colonies, and what to do with Germany when the war was won.

There was an education organiser in each fire force, and two men were released from other duties to be regional organisers. The FBU frequently had to step in to protect their facility time. They arranged weekly lectures for the discussion leaders on topics that might be suitable for discussion.

It's enough to make Brian Coleman and the chairs of several other fire authorities choke.

All this and much more will be found in a new book, *Firefighters and the Blitz*, which the FBU has taken a hand in producing and which will be published in September.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Alan Lamb (l) receives his 25-year badge from London brigade officers' secretary Pan Poullais



Archie Chandler (l) receives his 25-year badge from London officers' secretary Pan Poullais



Andy Pike (r) receives his 25-year badge from London officers' secretary Pan Poullais



Andy Bayston (r) receives his 25-year badge from Warwickshire brigade secretary Mark Rattray



Martin Green (l) receives his 25-year badge from London officers' secretary Pan Poullais



Chris Rodaway (r) receives his 25-year badge from Chester branch chair Dave Doneo



Peter Sheridan (l) receives his 25-year badge from Coatbridge, Strathclyde, branch chair John McCarroll



Tim Woodward (r) Nuneaton, receives his 25-year badge from Warwickshire brigade secretary Mark Rattray



Steven Sweet (r), Atherstone, receives his 25-year badge from Warwickshire brigade secretary Mark Rattray



(l to r) Dave Jackson, Frank Croxford and Shaun Rennell receive their 25-year badges from London brigade officers' secretary Pan Poullais



Neil McElvenny (r), Nuneaton, receives his 25-year badge from Warwickshire brigade secretary Mark Rattray

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→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
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→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
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→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
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→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
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→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
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→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
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→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
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→ **Region 10 London**
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→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
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→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre,
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→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS