

FireFighter

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

May 2008

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FIRE CONTROL JOBS**
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Defend control jobs



In an utterly disgraceful episode, fire and rescue authorities in south west England have written to the

Union notifying us that there may be redundancies among control staff. This was done without any prior consultation with local officials or staff. It has caused huge and justified anger throughout the Fire Brigades Union and we give notice to the employers concerned that we will not allow our members to be treated in such a disgraceful manner.

The proposals for job losses arise out of the FireControl project – aimed at regionalising emergency fire control rooms. This project is ill-thought out and the costs have escalated throughout its history. It appears that government (through the Department for Communities and Local Government) and employers wish to make our control staff members pay for these escalating costs.

The attitude demonstrated is quite staggering. One month our members are being praised for delivering such outstanding work in the floods of last year. Then, without notice, they are threatened with losing their jobs. This is not acceptable to the members directly concerned, it is not acceptable to me and I am sure FBU members throughout the UK will feel exactly the same.

The Fire Brigades Union has a longstanding opposition to redundancies and we will now be escalating our campaign around this issue. The Union's

annual conference in May will discuss our next steps and we will be allocating additional resources to this campaign. Every branch will need to discuss this issue as a matter of urgency so that our response can be considered.

We have said to our employers in recent years that we are quite willing to engage in dialogue with them – that is normal industrial relations. But if they want to impose change on us, attack our conditions, slash our jobs and undermine our service then we will fight back.

That is what our members did in the strikes in Suffolk, the West Midlands, Hertfordshire and in Merseyside. Indeed that is what our members have been doing month in and month out across the UK. If our employers seek to impose change on us then they will get a response – we will fight back. We have been fighting for Justice for Firefighter Pensions – we also demand Justice for Emergency Fire Control Staff.

Getting organised

The FireControl regionalisation proposals are dressed up as another aspect of so called 'modernisation.' Having recently attended meetings with members throughout the UK I know that many members are heartily sick of the mis-use of this word within the fire service. It appears that any half-baked scheme can be described as 'modernisation' and that appears to be the only justification that is required.

The sad truth is that our service and our jobs remain under attack and the only defence we have is to be organised. It is up to us in the Fire Brigades Union



to defend ourselves, our service and our profession – nobody else will do it for us.

In response to these challenges the union is addressing a number of demands. Our response will require well-trained and well informed officials. We have therefore recently taken on

Trevor Cave. Trevor has a long history in trade union education and he knows the fire service and the FBU well. He will be working over the next couple of years to ensure that our education and training programmes match the needs of today.

We have also employed



PAUL BOX

a new advisor on technical matters around IRMP and fire safety. Dave Sibert is extremely experienced in these areas. Dave, along with FBU officials expert in these fields, will ensure that the union is armed with the professional and technical input as our arguments develop over the future direction of the fire

and rescue service. These are challenging times for us all. There are no easy answers to the challenges we face. We will only defend ourselves if we are well informed, well-organised and willing to fight back when necessary.
Matt Wrack

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Trevor Cave has been hired to boost training for officials



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With support from the FBU, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and fellow firefighters, John Heenan has overcome the loss of an eye and is back on the watch fulltime

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and win a studio photographic session

WIN
a studio
photograph
session
see p30



COVER PICTURE:
GETTY IMAGES

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PAUL BOX



Committed and highly skilled emergency service workers are threatened with replacement by an untried and untested computer system

112 control jobs under threat in South West

REGIONAL CONTROLS

The Union has branded as “unacceptable” plans to slash the fire control room workforce in the south west of England by almost 66%. They were announced on 31 March by the Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC) that is to run the regional control centre (RCC) in Taunton.

Emergency fire control room operator staffing would be slashed from the current 175 to 63, a loss of 112 jobs in a public service that provides a life-saving capability to communities throughout the region.

The release of the details of the number of people expected to work in the regional control centre has reinforced the Union's

determination to oppose regional controls.

John Drake, FBU South West regional secretary said: “Both Clive Kemp (project director) and Cllr Jerry Willmott (chair of the LACC) have claimed that ‘the public will continue to receive a very high level of service’.

“We reject this assertion because it is based on replacing committed and highly skilled emergency service workers with an untried and untested computer system. These people have given a committed life-saving service to the public, only to be told that they can be replaced by a computer chip and thrown on the scrapheap.

“To add insult to injury, they are told that there will be redundancies but not told how many or where. To treat people in this

way is a disgrace. We demand that all fire authorities give our members immediate peace of mind by guaranteeing redeployment options.

“Technology alone cannot and will not provide all the answers to the problems a regional control centre will bring. Anyone who has used a computer knows this.

“The massive reduction in staffing numbers will not improve efficiency nor make the fire and rescue service more resilient, nor will it improve safety.

“Once again public opinion is being ignored as politicians play with people's lives. The FBU call upon the decision-makers to scrap this project, as they have recently done in Scotland.”

■ News special – page 7

FBU members and officials campaign against far right

LOCAL ELECTIONS

FBU members and officials were joining with other anti-fascist campaigners to oppose the far right in the May local elections as Firefighter went to press. The far-right British National Party was challenging in a record proportion of seats in England.

Within two weeks of the election yet another myth pedalled by the BNP was exploded when a new police report said that immigrants are no more likely than other communities to offend. The Association of Chief Police Officers said: "the evidence does not support theories of a large-scale

crime wave generated through migration."

BNP chairman Nick Griffin, whose party calls for the "immediate deportation of criminal and illegal immigrants," claimed in a controversial interview on BBC's Newsnight in April that Britain's hard drugs problem was related to Islam and Pakistani immigration.

In January 2007 BNP activist Mark Bulman was sentenced to five years imprisonment for attempted arson after throwing a bottle containing accelerant through the window of a Swindon mosque.

→ See page 16 for more on the Union's campaigns against fascism.

DENNIS LOW

The campaign included rallies in Hull and Grimsby



Humberside authority defers cuts

CUTS FIGHTBACK

Humberside fire authority has deferred a plan to close four fire stations, downgrade two others and axe one in ten frontline firefighter posts.

The chief fire officer must now explore ways of obtaining additional funding, carry out an impact assessment on what these proposals would mean for the communities affected and explore issues surrounding the recruitment of RDS firefighters. Councillors also called for negotiations with the FBU to find an acceptable solution to the proposals.

The decision, coming at the end of a five-hour meeting on April 11, followed a four-month campaign led by the FBU, which included marches and rallies in Hull and Grimsby.

FBU Yorkshire & Humberside regional chair Ian Murray said: "This campaign is not over by any means, but I'd like to extend thanks on behalf of the members and officials here in Humberside to all of those who have supported our campaign, attended

the rallies and assisted with campaign materials."

Fire chiefs had planned to close four fire stations (Sledmere, Waltham, Kirton in Lindsey and Hull Central), remove a fire engine at another (Immingham West) and end the immediate response capability of a fire engine at Goole. This would have meant between 100 and 110 fewer frontline firefighters available to respond to emergency incidents.

The public consultation leading up to the council meeting showed massive opposition which included eight petitions containing a total of 17,213 signatures and an additional 23,132 letters of objection. Of 194 e-mails in response to the consultation, only four supported the plans.

Members of Parliament from all parties publicly opposed the plans including Ian Cawsey, Elliot Morley, Graham Stuart, Greg Knight, Austin Mitchell, Alan Johnson, David Davis and Shona McIsaac.

→ More: www.youtube.com/fbutube

Sounding off!

SEAN STARBUCK

National Officer

RDS Equality

The result of an Employment Tribunal case at the end of March was a great step forward for our retained duty system (RDS) members.

In essence, the ruling accepts that RDS and wholetime firefighters do the same or broadly similar work and that RDS firefighters were treated less favourably than their wholetime colleagues in relation to access to the firefighters pension scheme and sick pay.

It dismissed an attempt to justify this less favourable treatment. The only point requiring clarification is the subsidiary claim in relation to increased pay for additional responsibilities, which was an "add on" to the main claim over pension rights, and sick pay.

The parties have eight weeks to make further written submissions.

Senior officials from the FBU are working with our solicitors Thompsons to see how this ruling can be applied. We are also looking at other areas that may also need addressing.

We have been working for eight years to achieve this

Members are obviously keen to find out exactly what this means for them and if, how and when they can join the FPS. We have been working for eight years to achieve this and members can be assured that the FBU will be working to get the maximum benefit from this ruling.

The FBU, through its workforce development group, is already looking at areas of concern around equal access for RDS firefighters to training and development opportunities, an area of work that can only benefit from this ruling.

→ The full ruling is posted on the FBU website www.fbu.org.uk and can be accessed by clicking the button marked 'Retained Duty' on the homepage.

Leslie Chappell,
Marden, Kent
celebrating the
Union's legal
victory



JESS HURD



The aftermath of the explosion

'National disaster' as firefighter is killed

NEW ZEALAND

One firefighter was killed and seven injured – two very seriously – by a fire in New Zealand on April 5. The nation's fire service described it as a "national disaster".

They had been called to a fire at a coolstore containing cheese, meat and vegetables in the Tamahere suburb of Hamilton after multiple explosions. Senior Station Officer Derek Lovell, with 25 years service, died from his injuries after being caught in a massive explosion. He was one of eight firefighters who initially responded.

The firefighters had been inside barely two minutes when an enormous fireball cut a swathe through the warehouse, local press reports say.

The FBU's sister union the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), has called for "an immediate increase in the number of fire appliances sent to all private fire alarm and privately monitored fire alarm calls received by the NZ Fire Service".

FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark has written to NZPFU General Secretary Derek Best to express on behalf of the FBU condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Derek Lovell.

He wrote: "Deaths of firefighters in the line of duty are sadly all too common and, whilst so disheartening, only serve to urge us on in the work we do." Andy Dark also extended best wishes to the injured firefighters and their families and friends.

Contractor accused of safety failures after Ground Zero fire

USA

The US government has fined Bovis Lend Lease for safety failures on a site in New York after two firefighters died fighting a blaze there last August.

The US Department of Labour's Occupational Safety

and Health Administration accused Bovis of 19 breaches of health and safety legislation and a subcontractor of 25.

These included allowing construction materials to block stairwells, not having enough fire extinguishers or emergency exit signs and failing to inspect a standpipe that did not work

when firefighters tried to use it to supply water.

Scaffolding was found to have been erected too close to power lines and electrical wires were left exposed. Bovis is working on other high-profile projects in New York, including a memorial for the victims of 9/11.

In brief

◆ A new local government pension scheme (LGPS) in England and Wales was introduced April 1. There are a number of improvements including: retention of a guaranteed final salary scheme with a faster accrual rate; increased death benefits; pensions for unmarried partners; and more flexible retirement provisions. Statutory regulations on early retirement because of ill-health are pending, along with a decision on whether ministers will extend a vital retirement protection. More info: www.fbu.org.uk



◆ The Government is making an additional £3.2 million available for England's fire and rescue authorities to help support the roll-out of the New Dimension equipment, such as mass decontamination units, additional PPE, rescue equipment for use in collapsed buildings and high volume pumps. Fire Minister Parmjit Dhandra said that training was "obviously vital to make best use of this equipment".

◆ The latest analysis of the gender pay gap from the Office for National Statistics shows that women in their 40s earn 20% less than men. Pay differences for full-time women workers peak between 40 and 49. Their pay gap of 20.3% compared with one of just 1% for women in their 20s. Researchers found that men and women earn a similar amount when they first start work, at 18 to 21 years old, but a gender pay gap starts appearing after about 10 years – and gets wider as women get older.

Defend emergency fire control staff!

PAUL BOX



SOUTH WEST FIRE CONTROL

The anger and outrage in south west England at the announcement in a press release on 31 March of plans to axe 112 jobs in emergency fire controls across the region is palpable. The local authority controlled company (LACC) that is to run the regional control centre (RCC) proposed a 66% cut in emergency fire control operators from the current 175 to 63.

The announcement was made without any prior consultation with staff or local FBU officials. Clive Kemp, former deputy chief fire officer of Devon and Somerset, is project director.

Said South West FBU Executive Council member Tam MacFarlane: "This move and the way it was announced has caused genuine fury across fire services in the south west. To make the announcement of possible future redundancies in the media before you tell your own staff is crass, foolish and insulting."

"With one press release and one letter they have stirred up a hornet's nest in this region. Whoever is responsible for this thoroughly deserves to hear the words 'you're fired' next time they step into the project board room."

But this is not just a local issue – the announcement came as part of the Government's disastrous high-cost, high-risk FireControl project for regional controls across England.

Members and officials across the UK are angry. The Union has a long-standing opposition to redundancies. At the Union's annual conference in May delegates from across the UK will discuss the FBU's next steps on how to escalate the campaign on regional controls. Every FBU branch is being called upon to discuss this issue as a matter of urgency.

General Secretary Matt said that the South West announcement had caused "huge and justified anger" throughout the Fire Brigades Union. "One month our members are being praised for delivering such outstanding work in the floods of last

year. Then, without notice, they are threatened with losing their jobs."

"The FireControl project to regionalise emergency fire control room is ill-thought out and the costs just keep escalating. It appears that Government and employers wish to make our control staff members pay for these escalating costs. We will not allow our members to be treated in such a disgraceful manner."

Executive Council member for control staff Sharon Riley called for regional controls to be shelved. "Consultants' fees and information technology and building costs are every increasing. And, unbelievably, the business case for FireControl is still pending. The latest estimate is that it will be out in June. Talk about putting the cart before the horse."

"Crucially, the staffing model being proposed means that the whole system of regional controls will reach saturation point many times faster than the current system."

The Union says the Government cannot carry on throwing money at the

project blindly against public, political and professional opinion.

"It's time the Government admitted what the professionals had been saying all along," said Sharon Riley. "Regional controls will not work, will not save money, will not improve either the safety of firefighters or the public."

"What is really needed is to do something now in the interests of protecting the current system which has always provided an excellent service and reliability in times of crisis. Yet the Westminster government seems determined to rush head first into yet another fiasco. This time, though, the stakes are far higher. It will be lives that are lost."

"Ministers should look north to Scotland which has thrown out the idea of regional controls before they even got off the ground."

"They decided that the best way to increase resilience and provide a robust service was to build on the existing network of brigade controls."

■ General secretary's comment – page 2

The staffing model means regional controls will reach saturation many times faster than the current system

Protecting the public from floods – a duty?

Fire crews were the heroes in last summer's floods. Now the government needs to listen to the FBU and learn the lessons

Magnificent. "Professional. Tireless. Marvellous. Absolutely brilliant. They did their best!! A host of superlatives have been used to describe the fire crews who dealt with the floods last summer.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary said at the time: "We have witnessed the biggest rescue effort in peacetime Britain by our emergency services. Sadly there have been deaths but as many as 3,500 people have been rescued by the fire service alone."

Official figures back this up. Last June, firefighters rescued nearly 800 people in Humberside while at least 300 were rescued from rooftops in South Yorkshire. In July, Gloucestershire crews rescued over 500 people, Hereford & Worcester firefighters made over 1,100 rescues and Oxfordshire carried out 230 boat rescues. At least 35

brigades responded by sending crews to the worst affected areas.

Other parts of the country, including West Yorkshire, London, Royal Berkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Warwickshire and the West Midlands also suffered floods throughout the summer period – and fire crews were at the forefront of saving lives and protecting services.

Matt Wrack added: "There has been a massive and outstanding national effort involving fire and rescue services from across

the country. They delivered a commitment and determination which you cannot buy off the shelf from the private sector."

Support for fire crews was widespread and politicians were suddenly keen for a photo opportunity with a firefighter. A Populus poll for The Times newspaper published on 31 July 2007 put the fire service top of the list for its response. Research by GfK NOP with flood victims found many grateful for the support they received (see right).

Government response disappointing

In light of the role played by crews, the FBU hoped that the official inquiries into the flooding would learn the lessons and listen to the Union. Last year Michael Pitt, who is carrying out the overall review into the floods, and Ken Knight, the government's chief fire adviser, promised to tackle the problems faced by crews carrying out rescues. However, their

**Hereford & Worcester
received 72,000 calls in 24
hours – more than double
the capacity of all regional
control centres**

reports so far have been very disappointing.

Michael Pitt published his interim report *Learning the Lessons from the 2007 Floods* in December last year, but largely ignored the perspective of fire crews. His report on the emergency response was shallow and made few suggestions to help fire and rescue services respond to future flooding.

This failing was summed up graphically by Pitt's statement that fire and rescue services usually attend to floods "as all fire and rescue crews are trained to work safely near water and are provided with suitable equipment to assist people in difficulty in water". He added that "selected stations have also been trained to offer a full water rescue capability, involving crew members working in water, using inflatable boats when the circumstances necessitate it".

The idea that all crews have been provided with the right gear will surprise many

WHAT THE PUBLIC SAID

GfK NOP research for the Pitt review gathered a wide range of positive comment from members of the public on the role of fire crews during the floods.

"The firemen that came were marvellous. Oh, they were absolutely brilliant."
(Householder, Doncaster)

"Fire and Rescue came down with their little inflatable boat and took people that needed to be evacuated."
(Householder, Barnsley)

"They (Fire and Rescue Service) were straight in there, even if they'd not got the leggings up to there or whatever, they were straight in there. Into that flood water. Going down the street, knocking on doors, getting old women out of houses. I thought they were brilliant. They took one woman out on a pallet truck. I don't know where they found that. From B&Q or something. They did their best."
(Householder, Chesterfield)

firefighters, who waded through contaminated flood water in unsuitable personal protective equipment or who rescued stranded people in borrowed boats.

Even worse was the *Facing the Challenge* report published by Ken Knight in March this year, which backed the government over regional control centres (RCCs).

Government figures show that during the floods, Hereford and Worcester control received 72,000 calls in one 24-hour period – more than double the entire capacity of every regional control centre. Yet Knight still felt "satisfied that the introduction of the RCCs will significantly enhance the service to the public and the response from the Fire and Rescue Service, particularly during periods of peak demand" (see page 10).

Knight gave the game away by advocating a call queuing system, whereby members of the public would be given "an automated

FLOODING AND THE FRS

announcement during periods of extreme demand". If this is the kind of service the public can expect under regional control centres, it is not one that the FBU and its members are willing to accept.

Both Pitt and Knight reject calls made by the FBU, with the backing of chief fire officers, for a statutory duty to respond to major flood incidents. At present fire and rescue services are not obliged by law to take part in flood rescue, though in practice fire crews always respond. The government doesn't want to make it a legal responsibility out of a misplaced desire to avoid "burdening" employers – and to avoid having to provide the resources needed. Sadly these "independent" advisers have ignored professional opinion and sided with government penny-pinching (see right).

The government has no idea about the scale of water-related incidents crews deal with. Asked by John McDonnell MP on 14 March 2008 how many incidents on or near water were attended by the fire service since 1994, broken down by brigade and region, fire minister Parmjit Dhanda replied that the information requested "was not held centrally".

At the same time, there is a central fault line in current national resilience planning for major events like flooding, as a result of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs). Many IRMPs have not tackled the risks of water-related incidents adequately. IRMPs have also been used to instigate cuts in staff. Earlier this year Humberside FRS announced it would put more resources into water rescue equipment, while cutting one in ten frontline firefighter posts.

Health, safety and welfare issues

The health, safety and welfare of fire crews were put at risk during the floods through insufficient planning, equipment and training. Firefighters should not have had to wade



The government doesn't want to make it a legal responsibility to avoid having to provide the resources needed

Firefighters evacuate an elderly man from rising flood waters at Otney Island near Oxford on July 25, 2007

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES AND THE FLOODS

The fire service's response to the floods would have been hampered if the government's plans for regional control centres had been in place.

Before the floods, on 2 February 2007 John McDonnell MP asked the government what the typical or average maximum hourly call handling capacity is expected to be of each of the regional control centres proposed under the FiReControl project. He was told the call handling capacity nationwide would be 32,505 calls in a 24 hour period.

This was half the capacity needed by just one fire and rescue service (Hereford and Worcester) at the height of the floods just a few months later (72,000 calls).

The FBU argues that the move to regional control centres will involve about 570 job losses – nearly a third of the total. If fewer staff had been available during the floods, then many more calls would have gone unanswered.

These fears were highlighted by another parliamentary question, which was put on 7 March 2008. Asked what estimate had been made of the number of staff required at any one time to provide a resilient 24-hour operation when regional control centres have been introduced, fire minister Parmjit Dhanda wrote that from 11pm until 4pm the following day there would be no more than 76 control operators – and sometimes only 59 – across the whole of England on duty.

The Union wants the government to take note of the decision in Scotland to retain existing control rooms while implementing new technology and communications. The government should think again on regional control.

Far right: Firefighters help people from their boats in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, as the level of the River Thames rises on July 23 2007

through contaminated water wearing unsuitable protective equipment and exposing themselves to health hazards. Fire crews should not have had to work excessive hours without sufficient nourishment and without decent rest facilities.

A Daily Mirror investigation of flood waters around Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire during the floods found a total of 160,000 bugs per one millilitre of water. The samples included levels of E.coli, coliforms and clostridia bugs and were enough to cause vomiting and stomach upsets if ingested.

The FBU raised these concerns at the time of the floods. The Union reported the case of a firefighter who rescued someone from a flooded ditch and went down with a virus, thought to have been contracted from contaminated water. He was in hospital for six days and off work for two weeks. The FBU South West issued advice on the risks of zoonoses (animal-born infections).

It is not clear that all fire and rescue services have understood the risks of infection. FBU representatives have raised the issues of inoculation and of health surveillance with management during debriefings following the flooding, but have not met with a satisfactory response.

Northumberland crews complained that they were given very little in terms of welfare or personal items when mobilised and had to rely on supermarkets for food and refreshment.

Fire crews from the South-West of England reported that few welfare provisions were in place for washing, toilet and rest. During the floods one crew responding to the Gloucestershire incidents had no accommodation or rest facilities provided and had to sleep on the floor. The Union is aware of crews working excessive hours, some for as long as 32 hours at a time.

Other firefighters mobilised during the

floods complained about the life jackets they were issued with, which were restrictive when physically lifting people. Nor were they issued with head torches and hand lamps, despite working throughout the night. Firefighters had their personal protective equipment (PPE) borrowed by other crews because of shortages.

During the floods kit designed to resist heat offered little water resistance. If the flooding had taken place in winter, firefighters would have risked hypothermia. The FBU knows of recent testing by Grampian FRS on some PPE which turned out to have negative buoyancy – i.e. it sank.

“We were extremely fortunate that none of those FBU members wearing firefighting PPE in water drowned,” says National Officer for Health, Safety and Welfare John McGhee, who has been raising the problems with welfare arrangements with forums that result in advice to ministers, such as the National H&S group, the New Dimensions Sounding Board, and the Practitioners Forum.

The Union does not accept the assumption that current water safety training and water rescue training is equipping fire service personnel with the skills required for dealing with floodwater. There is also variation in the training provided across different fire and rescue services which needs to be addressed. The Union wants the government to develop a national, accredited training system to ensure consistent and appropriate training for sufficient personnel to deal with the full range of water-related incidents.

Climate change means more the fire service will be dealing with more extreme weather events such as flooding. The FBU wants the personnel, resources and equipment in place now in readiness for the next emergency.

→ The FBU's submission to the Pitt Review is available at: www.fbu.org.uk

PETER MACDARMID/GETTY IMAGES



A firefighter evacuates a boy from rising flood waters at Otney Island near Oxford on July 25, 2007

STATUTORY DUTY

At present fire and rescue services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland do not have a specific statutory duty to respond to flooding incidents – it is discretionary.

The FBU believes that a statutory duty on fire and rescue services to attend serious flooding is in the best interests of both the public and fire crews. There are a number of benefits from changing the law.

A new law would make water-related incidents core activities for fire and rescue services and make the case for extra resources easier to make. Without it, local fire and rescue services can hedge their bets on the risks of flooding in their own areas, weakening national resilience. Backed by the law, a more coherent and planned response would have to be made for future events.

The government is reluctant to change the law and seems hung up on the “light touch” approach demanded by business. But the FBU and CFA want the law changed and don't regard legislation as a burden.

After the experience of the summer 2007 floods, the FBU believes that the case for imposing a statutory duty for major floods is overwhelming. The public expects fire service personnel to respond in an emergency situation and fire service personnel, with our training and expertise, expect to participate in rescue efforts. Imposing a duty, as long as it is backed by the necessary resources, will help the fire and rescue service prepare for the next floods.

ORGANISE, ORGANISE!

The Union has launched a drive to recruit all uniformed members of the UK fire and rescue service – so that they and the Union will both benefit from the collective strength that this will create

Modernisation is a word with many connotations. When used by government it very often means cuts – in the fire service's case, to front-line services and personnel. Modernisation has also brought a significant shake-up in the architecture governing the fire service at Government level and at a local level.

With local integrated risk management plans (IRMPs) replacing national standards of fire cover and, under the new Grey Book, important areas of bargaining passed down to brigade level, greater responsibility has been entrusted to brigade and branch reps to negotiate with brigade management and organise.

"There have been big changes in the fire service in recent times and the agenda is ongoing. As union officials, we're constantly trying to adapt to the policy changes. Now we've taken on far more with respect to negotiating and consultation on a local basis, it's far busier," says FBU Highlands & Islands brigade chair Fraser Parr, who admits that he finds the job "quite stressful" at times.

Kevin Brown, regional secretary, FBU North West, adds: "Negotiations on duty systems and other working practices have been devolved to us. But local negotiating and modernisation isn't working. Local disputes and misunderstanding around the new Grey Book are endemic. Many areas affecting conditions of work of FBU members are unclear."

To ensure the most effective response to these challenges, the Union has embarked on a recruitment drive of all uniformed members of the UK fire and rescue service.

Says General Secretary Matt Wrack: "These days any half-baked scheme can be described as 'modernisation'. And that appears to be the only justification that is required. Our service and our jobs are under attack – a record number of disputes confirm this. The only defence we have is to be organised."

The Union nationally has been keen to lend support to local officials as they respond to "modernisation" and rise to the organising challenge: so what exactly has it been doing?

"One area we identified was the need for well-presented literature to assist branch officials in their jobs and to explain

to members the benefits of FBU membership. The FBU is the only national organisation truly representing the interests of uniformed fire service personnel and offers also great advantages, such as legal services and our Accident and Injury Fund, to individual members," says FBU National Officer Paul Woolstenholmes.

"We want to make sure this message gets across to existing members and those who are missing out on the opportunity of membership. The production of new materials for members and reps goes hand-in-hand with our current recruitment drive."

New packs

A branch officials' pack, including a handbook, a rule book and a new health and safety guide was sent out in February from the Union's national office in Kingston-Upon-Thames and branch reps should have received them by now*.

This followed a new members' welcome pack produced and distributed by the union nationally last summer.

This provides information on the Union, how it represents its members, its services (such as legal assistance), information about the Accident and Injury Fund, the policy on bullying, workplace harassment and fairness at work and the myriad benefits that come from membership. There's also a Powerpoint presentation designed specifically for reps.

"For us, recruiting is very difficult because in winter if you go to certain islands you can get stuck there for a week," says Fraser Parr. "The literature is very useful, particularly the new members' pack. It's a fantastic step

forward."

John Hogg, a Highlands & Islands colleague who is RDS station rep at Grantown-on-Spey station, adds: "The new members' packs are a big help. Not everyone has a computer. I leave the packs in the station so crews on standby can pick them up. It's made my job easier and given vital back-up."

This is the message being reported back from a number of brigades to the 13-member National

*** If you have not received your branch officials pack contact your regional office in the first instance.**



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**John Hogg,
Highlands &
Islands RDS
station rep:
New
members'
pack are a
great help**



**Mark Rowe,
Merseyside
station rep:
We use all
means at our
disposal to
organise –
including phone
networks and
group texts**

Retained Committee (NRC), which as part of its responsibilities supports over 50 brigade-level reps specially focused on retained members' issues and hundreds of reps at FBU retained branches across the UK.

Says NRC Secretary Pete Preston: "The new members' packs have been an asset and extremely well-received. Reps are using Union-supplied resources – including *Firefighter* magazine and *Alerter* (the quarterly publication for retained firefighters) – in different ways to achieve engagement in winning new members and increasing activity among existing members."

As well as literature specifically aimed at RDS firefighters, the new members' pack also includes a leaflet drawn up by the National Women's Committee (NWC) explaining the benefits of FBU membership to uniformed women staff in the UK fire and rescue service.

Raising awareness

Says Kerry Baigent, NWC Secretary: "When the National Women's Committee was formally established in 1999 there were a handful of reps who were women. But we now have a network of over 50 women at brigade, regional and national level who represent women in the fire service across the country. And that's not counting a large number of women members who are officials representing all members at all levels and women FBU control staff representing emergency fire control staff.

"A new NWC leaflet in the Union's membership pack has been helpful in raising awareness that there is a dedicated team in place to ensure issues specific to women are addressed. We want all women members to play a full part in the life and work of the Union and to ensure that they are supported in the workplace on issues specific to them."

The new resources supplied by the Union nationally have been largely welcomed by reps. Now Kevin Brown needs additional back-up. He says: "The new members' pack is good, as it spells out the benefits. It's a significant step forward. Now we need to back it up with education and training. We need to equip our officials with the tools to do the job."

Mark Dunne, brigade chair, Merseyside, concurs: "We need more negotiating education for our reps to negotiate effectively locally. They need training in how to deal with a chief fire officer and the managers and what to expect from negotiations."

To tackle such demands the Union is planning a new

educational and organising programme that seeks to empower the new role reps find themselves pursuing.

Trevor Cave, former head of trade union studies at Park Lane College, Leeds, has been working with the Union since 1988 as a national tutor. He has now taken up a full-time role as an educational advisor to the FBU.

Develop skills and confidence

Trevor will assist with a review of the union's educational strategy in the light of recent changes to the fire service and develop a range of courses designed specifically to meet the needs created by the increasingly wide role of branch reps and brigade officials.

He will be paying particular attention to the new Grey Book with its new national conditions of service and the more recent industrial relations protocol, which was signed by the national employers and the Union in June 2007.

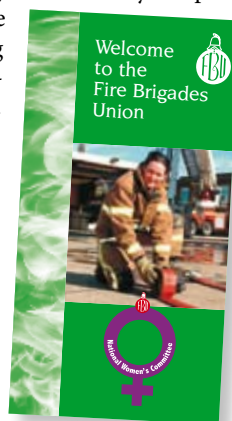
He says: "We will be looking to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge of local officials when dealing with local brigades. We will help officials handle changes at work, such as proposals for new shift patterns or issues raised by the publication of new health and safety regulations.

We will look to help senior officials with their professional and trade union development, considering, for example, how to ensure the effective application of both national and local agreements in the interests of the union and our membership."

Trevor, who spent seven years as an official with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) before and during the dispute in the 80s, said the FBU has always been proactive in its support of trade union and political education for officials and active members: "There's a strong tradition valuing trade union and political education in the FBU that we can build on. One of the challenges now is to strengthen and

modernise what we provide. To this end we shall need to utilise the full range of resources made available by the Union – continuing to find ways of linking both the learning and organising agendas. I'm excited about it as we can do a really effective job."

The Union's education programme has also traditionally been used to promote fairness at work and the Union is planning training on equality impact assessments which, if properly implemented by fire authorities, should help eliminate discrimination in the workplace. This follows training last year on new equality legislation placing gender and disability duties on public bodies.



Just as with black and women firefighters, the fire service is struggling to recruit and retain RDS members. To make them aware of the opportunities available to them and to assist with problems they face in their employment, Daniel Giblin has been hired by the Union from the TUC Organising Academy for 12 months through to November 2008.

Beefing up the Union's organising capacity, he has been touring the country's fire stations. Daniel cut his activist teeth in campaigns around cuts and pensions in the civil service for the PCS trade union.

He says: "For RDS members, balancing the demands of two jobs, it's sometimes a challenge to find the time to get active in the Union. But it's your Union and working together collectively is the best way to defend and promote your interests and those of the communities you serve and protect. And, of course, nobody knows your issues better than you.

"I'll be visiting a fire station near you in the next few months and I look forward to meeting you."

Recruitment

So far the news on the organising front is pretty good. The FBU already has phenomenal support within its sector. More than 80% of the uniformed staff throughout the UK fire and rescue service – including officers, retained firefighters and control staff – are members of the Union.

When comparison is made with other sectors the contrast is stark. According to the TUC, only 28 per cent of the total UK workforce is unionised with the private sector at 17 per cent, retail and hospitality sectors a mere 10 per cent and the public sector now standing at 60 per cent." Says Paul Nowak, TUC National Organiser for recruitment: "The FBU is a union in a very strong position."

Recent figures show the FBU is getting even stronger. More than 230 uniformed staff joined the Union in the first quarter of the year. The biggest influx was of firefighters working the retained duty system, particularly from the East of England (Region 9), Scotland (Region 1), Wales (Region 8) and southern England (Region 11).

Firefighter has been told that there are many completed applications – from Cornwall to the Scottish Highlands – yet to make it on the Union's membership system, so further evidence of a growing union is expected in the coming months.

Says NRC Secretary Pete Preston: "We know that local issues are very important and in seeking to organise we pursue different approaches depending on local circumstances. It's enabled us to increase dialogue with stations that haven't had much contact with the union.

"Hertfordshire is a good recent example. The local reps have gained respect and interest from firefighters who hadn't had any interest in the Union before. They've got themselves a brigade retained rep out of their work. It's been a huge, huge benefit to us.

"But clearly national issues are hugely important too. When RDS firefighters see the massively important legal victory of ending discrimination against RDS firefighters, achieved after eight years of legal battles, when they see that we continue to be the only organisation negotiating nationally with employers over their pay and conditions, they know there is only one organisation that is 100% behind them – the FBU.

In the Highlands & Islands, the Union has seen recruitment successes at Dunvegan, Staffin and Glenelg stations. Says John Hogg: "Recruitment has gone well in the last few



230-plus
members
joined in
the first
quarter

years. I emphasise that we've got to stick together and go forward together. And I say that because the Union provides solid support, the Union is the best way to do that. It's a simple message but it's getting through."

Following negotiations with the FBU a number of years ago, the Government, set a target of women making up 15 per cent of firefighters in England and Wales by 2009. The Union saw this as a minimum requirement to help promote equality in the service and also to allow it to respond to the needs of the communities it serves.

Currently the figure is 2.8 per cent and next month the Department of Communities and Local Government will relaunch its campaign to recruit women firefighters.

Real issues in the workplace

Says Kerry Baigent: "Every training course by 2013 is supposed to have between 12-18 per cent female recruits. London is already hitting 10 per cent. Even if advances in equality are slow, the service is changing.

"We, as a Union, have to make sure we're addressing the real issues in the workplace. Women members tell us that a whole range of matters – from health and safety, career progression and work-life balance – need to be addressed.

"Women in the fire service deserve equal treatment.

Trevor Cave (right),
National Education
Advisor: Devising
plan to develop skills,
confidence and knowledge
of local officials





**Daniel Giblin, TUC
Organising Academy:
Working together
collectively is the
best way forward**

The increasing numbers of women firefighters attending NWC meetings up and down the country shows they are determined to get it. And we in the NWC are equally determined."

Kevin Brown, for his part, is also optimistic about the levels of activity of existing members and reps in the North West: "We're on the up. We are attracting officials again and we're getting over-subscribed officials' training courses."

Says Mark Dunn, Merseyside brigade chair: "Merseyside is a hotbed for union-busting. The present management of Merseyside has said members of unions will not be promoted. They try to undermine us all the time. But firefighters on Merseyside have been very resolute in their support of the union."

Mark Rowe, branch rep at Merseyside's Wallasey station on the Wirral, adds: "We have to match management in every aspect in order to keep members informed. We use a variety of means at our disposal to organise – including extensive phone networks and group texts. We've got 45 signed up to local educational courses at the moment."

"There's strong interest in the Union, partly due to our social and economic history and also because our management is quite aggressive. On Merseyside we're well organised."



HEALTH & SAFETY

With the increase in fatalities in the service and continuing high levels of injuries – 350 among firefighters in 2006, according to the latest CLG Fire Statistics – health and safety is high on the Union's agenda.

Safety reps in the 2,000-odd FBU branches across the UK are absolutely crucial to efforts at avoiding any more loss of life and minimising injuries in the future. To tool them up for an increasingly demanding job, they will soon each receive a special pack that will map out safety reps' legal rights – including the right to paid time off for training – and will include an inspection checklist and other easy-to-use resources that will allow them to identify trends in workplace injuries to then raise with management.

Paul Nowak, TUC National Organiser for recruitment, confirms the importance of health and safety in the modern workplace: "All the surveys and opinion polls we've taken show us this is the issue most working people care about."

"It doesn't matter what sort of job you do – manager, supervisor, shopfloor, carer – everyone says it's their top priority. Fundamentally work should be safe, it shouldn't damage your health. There's no better way for trade unions to convince people of the importance of being a member than by focusing on health and safety."

More: www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/healthsafety

LRD LOCAL POLICY DATABASE: BIGGER, BETTER

Launched in 2004, the password-protected online database of local policies managed by the Labour Research Department, is seen as a useful resource for FBU officials.

It allows brigade officials, at a touch of a button, to compare and contrast between brigades, regions and national conditions in the Grey Book, as well as sectors in the rest of the economy.

Overall, the database now contains more than 600 documents, providing coverage of local fire service arrangements on a wide range of issues, from allowances, childcare, disciplinary procedures and duty systems to overtime arrangements, union facilities agreements and whistleblowing.

There are 30 documents available relating to each of the following categories: bullying and harassment; discipline, conduct and capability; equal opportunities; flexible working; health & safety; holidays; sick pay; training and development; working patterns and duty systems. It now covers more areas, including sickness absence, time off for public duties, expenses, job sharing, and union facilities and has an improved interface.

Mark Dunne, brigade chair, FBU Merseyside says: "We use the Labour Research Department local policy database on a weekly basis. It's a powerful tool."

Fraser Parr, Highlands and Islands brigade secretary, agrees: "I find the LRD database of local policies useful when we're negotiating on a particular policy such as day duties or sick leave."

The Union estimates that officials in every brigade have made use of the database in the past 12-15 months.

Brigade officials can access the password-protected database at www.fbu.org.uk or www.lrd.org.uk/services/payline/fbu/ and are reminded to send all existing and new local policies to pay@lrd.org.uk.



SPECIAL FBU EDUCATION REPORT

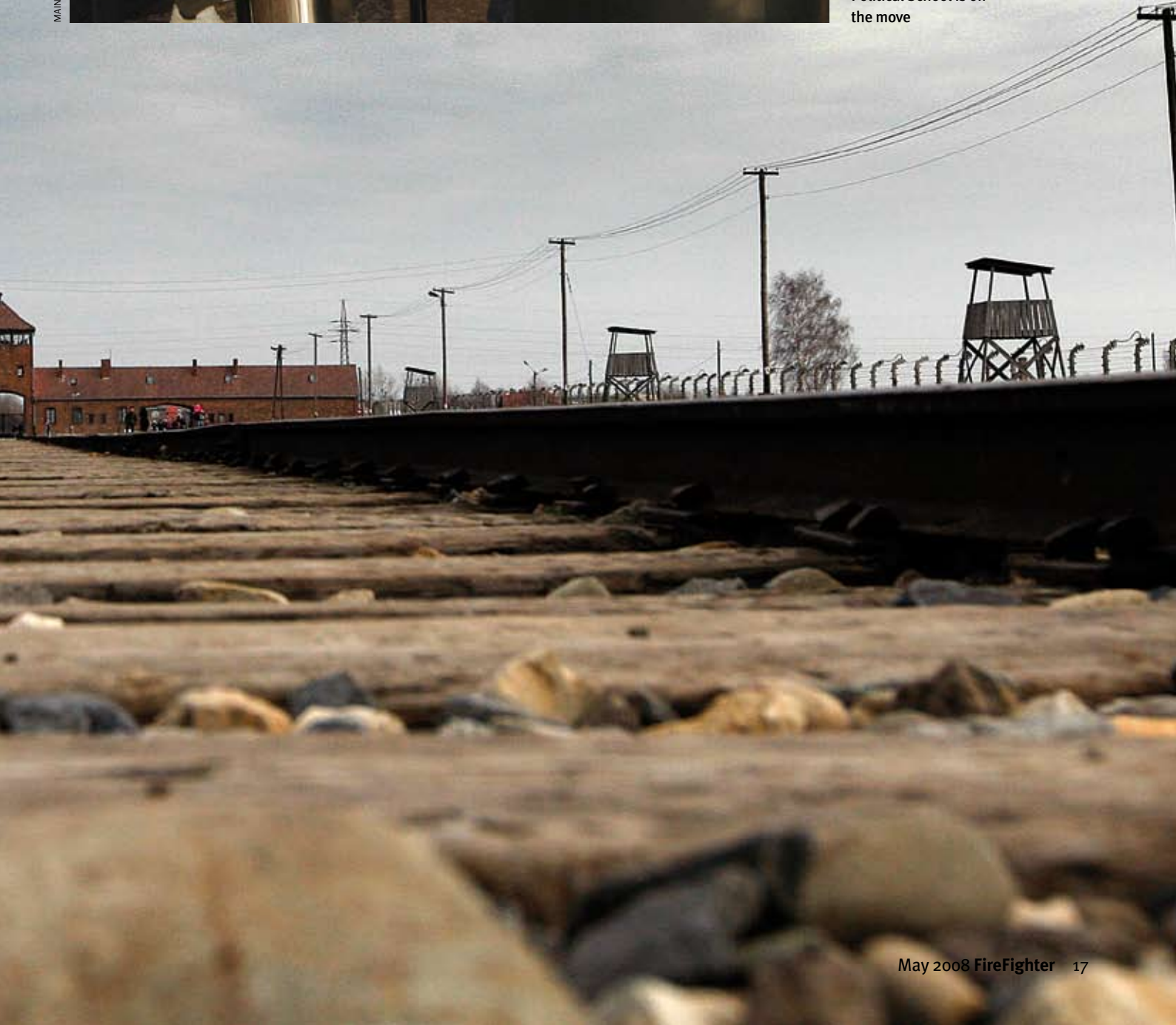
STOP THAT FASCIST TRAIN

In a ground-breaking new format for FBU Education, 20 officials from the North East went to Poland this March to learn about the far-right – and witness first hand its legacy





From Newcastle to Krakow and to Poland's Nazi concentration camps – the FBU's North East Political School is on the move



FIREFIGHTERS UNITED

In this May's local elections the BNP mounted an unprecedented push to win seats in England, presenting candidates in a record proportion of wards. Once again, FBU members and officials – along with other trade unionists – played their part in seeking to stop the BNP gaining in the ballot box. But why should trade unions be involved in campaigning against such organisations?

In the simplest terms trade unions are based on the unity of workers and anything that weakens that unity weakens the union and undermines our ability to improve things for our members. This is not about curtailing debate. But let's be clear – the aims of fascism and far right organisations are fundamentally opposed to trade unions. Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany sought the complete destruction of the labour movement. So out of self-preservation, if nothing else, we need to oppose fascism and the far right.

Martin Niemöller is an unlikely hero – he was a previous supporter of Hitler who had preached that Jews were damned because they had killed Jesus. But his famous words have resonated through to today:

*"First they took the Communists, but I was not a Communist, so I said nothing.
Then they took the Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat, so I did nothing.
Then it was the trade unionists' turn, but I was not a trade unionist.
And then they took the Jews, but I was not a Jew, so I did little.
Then, when they came and took me, there was no-one left who could have stood up for me."*

Having lived through this experience, Niemöller would know exactly the order in which repression was unleashed. By the time Kristallnacht came in November 1938, concentration camps already existed and tens of thousands had already been imprisoned.

Before the Nazis carried out genocide, based on ethnic origins and race, they moved on the organisations of the labour movement, abolishing trade unions, collective bargaining, the right to strike and even the right to quit. It was the destruction of political parties and the unions, which enabled all democratic rights to be crushed and which in turn paved the way for the horrors of the camps.

Today trade unions remain as vital to workers as ever – and the facts bear it out. Employees in a union earn more, and they get better training, sick pay, pensions and so on. Unionised workplaces are also more family friendly and score better on equality – with a narrower pay gender gap, for example. And we are most effective when there is the unity of all members. Overcoming industrial or broader societal divisions makes our Union strong, and this is true for our opposition to employers' attempts to drive a wedge between us according to duty system and rank, and, for example, when they sought to divide us by sex, blaming women firefighters for detrimental changes to shifts.

And we need to be strong, because there are many battles ahead. We have our retained firefighter members who are the backbone of the fire service in many parts of the country. But they still face continuing inequality and discrimination. And while the ethnic minority population in England is around 5m (or 9-10% of the population), there are just 53 black and ethnic minority women firefighters and control staff in England.

If we are not seen to be representing all and we allow ourselves to be divided, we will not be able to overcome these challenges now and in the future. We will be fundamentally weakened, and all

members will lose out. We have to be united to face those who seek to divide.

It is coming up to the 40th anniversary of Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood speech" – seen by many on the right as a warning about immigration and its dangers to British society. Ironically as Minister of Health, Powell had encouraged immigration to provide workers for the NHS. In the post war economy there were frequent labour shortages. Immigration filled the gap, as it does today.

The establishment faced two ways – wanting the migrant labour but not wanting to grant equal rights, equal pay and equal treatment. This goes back a long way – the Irish suffered the same treatment. Migrant workers have usually ended up in lower paid, back-breaking work. This is the origin of our minority ethnic communities today. But despite some progress, inequality persists.

Far-right organisations, sections of the media, and not a few senior politicians have been telling us we are being "swamped", that migrants are abusing the benefit system, draining public services. But who hears the true story – that of exploitation?

According to recent research by the TUC, migrants are treated with little respect at work, with employers paying scant regard for their health and well-being. Many are denied legalities that most of us take for granted – wage slips, contracts of employment, and wages paid in full. Worse, the threat of violence is never far from the surface.

Perhaps the most visible form of exploitation to us in the fire service is in housing: many migrants are forced to live in poor and crowded conditions in HMOs; seasonal migrant workers reside in caravans. Concerns about fire risks abound. There was a fire earlier this year at a caravan site housing migrants in Arbroath, Scotland. A worker from the Czech Republic died and another was seriously injured, a tragic case that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), noted as "highlighting the dangers that migrant workers' accommodation can pose if some basic precautions are not taken".

The HSE also noted in reference to this incident that "migrants provide a valuable labour force". Indeed, there is plenty of research to show the crucial contribution migrants make to society today.

Trade unions can respond to migration by adopting a hostile approach. After Enoch Powell's speech, some dock workers marched to highlight the perceived threat of being undercut by migrants. Or we can organise, recruit and campaign against division.

Trade unions today have chosen the latter, organising for example, migrant workers among a large and growing number of agency workers employed in the public sector, most notably the NHS. Even in the fire service, the FBU has recently recruited Eastern European migrants from London to the North West and Northern Ireland.

Let's be clear. We are not living in the 1920-30s, although there are aspects of society today that reflect that period, and a global financial crisis is one of them. Fascists continue to prey on fear and feelings of insecurity, particularly among those in poor, run down areas who, today, feel abandoned by the Labour Government and Labour local councils.

It is up to us in the labour movement to offer an alternative: that ends the cuts, fights for decent education, services and jobs, and campaigns against division on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex or sexuality. While racists, fascists and the far right breed on hopelessness, we, as trade unionists, need to offer hope.

■ This is an edited version of a speech given by General Secretary Matt Wrack to the school

INTRODUCTION WHY THIS SCHOOL?

They say that history is not worth the paper it's written on if we don't learn from it. And in terms of modern history it's hard to think of an issue which merits as much consideration as the mass murder and execution by the Nazis of almost six and a half million Jews, Gypsies, people with disabilities, intellectuals, artists and political activists, including trade unionists.

Yet it would appear that it's a subject which has not been given the consideration it deserves. There are numerous events that have taken place which bear remarkably similar characteristics and in the worst cases have resulted in remarkably similar results, albeit on a smaller scale: take, most recently, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and, this year in Kenya, where amongst other atrocities the process of ethnic cleansing was deemed to be justifiable. And in each case, a common thread was the oppression of ordinary working people.

Only by understanding the circumstances that allowed the Nazis to undertake what, at root, amounted to a cull of all those who could be identified as potential opponents, or even just representing an inconvenience, can we hope to prevent similar events taking place in the future.

In March, in an effort to understand that past and put it into a modern context, the FBU in the North East (Region 3), together with the Newcastle Trade Union Education Centre, held a political school in Krakow, Poland, a location that was chosen primarily because of its proximity to both the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps, locations which were to prove more than a little difficult for many

of the students and tutors.

The purpose of the school was to address the relationship between the far right and the trade unions in order that we could identify a clear strategy in terms of how we as trade unionists can counter the activities of far right extremist groups.

As General Secretary Matt Wrack pointed out in his speech opening the school, the FBU is a longstanding opponent of extremist organisations that align themselves to the far right. For they are at complete odds with what we as a trade union promote - they are completely opposed to equality of opportunity, opposed to diversity, and see no need for openness or democracy. What they do stand for is division, imposition and if necessary violence. The FBU's internationalism should be understood in this context - we have, and continue to seek links with likeminded organisations promoting the collective voice and the protection of ordinary working people, regardless of geographical location.

The success of the course depended not just on the volume of input from students, but more importantly from the level of honesty that some of the activities required. This was the message from Patrick Hutchinson, our tutor from Newcastle Trade Union Education Centre. Students would know what the 'trade union' answer to a question should be, Patrick said. But the answers should be almost instinctive. We were warned that we would find some of the activities challenging, disturbing and possibly quite poignant.

■ **Andy Noble, Brigade Secretary, Tyne and Wear**

General Secretary Matt Wrack opens the school



FBU students from Cleveland, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear with North East regional officials, General Secretary Matt Wrack and tutor Patrick Hutchinson



THE CLASSES THE THEORY

In line with the choice of location, we focused on the history of the far right in a European context, and in particular, the German National Socialist and Italian Fascist models.

Pre-course study material proved invaluable. A book was provided which was not only good research but also motivational. Entitled "In Exciting Times", it was an account of the repeated, yet failed attempts of Sir Oswald Mosley to instil some of the Nazi values on the people of the North East. It apparently didn't go down too well with the locals and often resulted in his Lordship being seen running, very quickly, in the opposite direction of a great number of people who no doubt wanted to tell him face to face via the normal debating process exactly what they thought of him.

We debated what were common traits between Nazism and Fascism and the modern extreme right:

- Extreme nationalism (Not patriotism)
- Disdain of human rights
- Intolerance of those who are different
- Identification and abuse of scapegoats
- Misuse of military forces
- State controlled media
- Obsession with national security, bordering on national paranoia
- Manipulation of accepted religion
- Corporate power being protected
- Labour power being suppressed
- Disdain for intellectuals and arts
- Obsession with crime and particularly the severity of punishment
- Corruption and cronyism
- Fraudulent elections

We went on to discuss such approaches and characteristics in relation to various regimes and how they propped up in pre-war Germany a government that never gained more than 33% support of the electorate. This is a little known fact which we should attach great significance to, if for no other reason than to highlight that by affording extreme minority 'political' parties a platform, it can in the eyes of some legitimise their beliefs, regardless of how abhorrent they may seem.

■ **Andy Noble**



Sir Oswald Mosley tried to instil Nazi values on the people of the North East. It apparently didn't go down too well with the locals

QUESTION TIME

To highlight the difficulties that present day right wing extremists pose, the school was divided into three groups and allocated a role in our own FBU version of that well known, completely independent, unbiased current affairs

programme, otherwise known as "Question Time". These roles were:

- Far right council candidates
- Anti fascist activists
- Audience

The debate was chaired by the Executive Council member for the North East (Region 3), Alan McLean, in much the same way as "Question Time" is on the television (badly). The questions from the audience were not vetted (unlike "Question Time") and were relating to the type of issues that the far right focus on.

TRADE UNION VALUES

The days in the classroom were intense, but really informative. It was like going back to basics in a way, remembering the fundamental values of trade unions, and why those values are important.

Discussing fascism and the impact on individuals and groups discriminated against and how that can then affect the workplace and society in general. This led us on to Fascism in the 1940s, some of the main factors which supported it and eventually the reason for our trip, the visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau.

Mandy Cregin, Northumberland, FBU Women's Rep

Students learning about the far right in Europe, then and now

THE VISITS AUSCHWITZ BIRKENAU

Auschwitz

For many of us the visits to the camps were a source of some apprehension and while I had always wanted to visit Auschwitz the nearer the time came the more apprehensive I became. On the morning we had to be on the road by 0930hrs. As we waited for the bus it started to snow. We drove for an hour through the bleak wintry countryside until we arrived at Auschwitz.

On arrival we were met by our guide Pitör who led us to one of the most recognisable icons of the 20th Century - the actual gates of Auschwitz. Yet they appeared almost insignificant and even "ordinary". I felt guilty, as I was almost disappointed by the lack of scale and the fact that they looked like a side entrance to a small factory. However, just inside the gates was the first indication of the real purpose of this place: a small notice stated that executed prisoners who had attempted to escape were left at the entrance as a warning to others.

As we followed Pitör he recounted various tales of personal tragedy - and attempted to convey the sheer scale of the genocide that had taken place in the name of Nazi Germany. It was numbing to see 80,000 pairs of shoes, tons of hair shaved from the heads of victims (to be used in the manufacture of carpets and clothing) and thousands of suitcases upon which were the names, addresses and occupations the owners had been told to write. It certainly made me think differently of the term "Human Resources!"

Most distressing for me were the two displays of tiny hand-made baby clothes and the stockpile of artificial limbs and crutches. Both of those groups would have been executed immediately, as they were not deemed productive labour.

As we walked around the camp, our mood changed. The sheer scale of the torment and inhumanity people had suffered in this place began to hit home. At one point, as we were listening to Pitör talking of the largest single execution in Auschwitz on 19 July 1943, I realised with horror we were standing directly under the improvised gallows used to hang the 12 men.

But worse was still to come. We were led into Block 11, commonly referred to as 'the block of death'. The tales of torture, cruelty and physical brutality were impossible to comprehend. It was here that we had to wait in a corridor lined with photographs of the dead. The eyes of those poor souls were impossible to bear and the corridor very quickly became oppressive and we were all relieved to move on.

However, the relief was short lived as we were led into the torture cells in the basement. Everyone was visibly moved at this point and



Gas chamber in Auschwitz: lorries would be started up outside to mask the sounds of screaming

PA

yet all I could think to say was “what a god awful place to die.” We then moved onto the “wall of death” where over 7,000 victims were shot after being tortured and starved. Many were locals who had tried to help and who were tried before the weekly Gestapo court.

As we proceeded towards the end of the tour the Commandant’s house came into view - a mere 300 yards from the gas chamber and crematoria. It was also a similar distance from the gallows upon which he was eventually hung.

It is impossible to explain my feelings as we entered the gas chamber. Still obvious were the opening where the poison gas was administered and where a lorry had to be started up outside to mask the sounds of mainly women and children screaming as they died in agony and terror.

Adjoining the gas chamber is the crematoria where the furnaces are still intact. How many people could be cremated in a day? Pitör said 340 – but Birkenau could incinerate 8,000 a day! The numbers are still impossible to comprehend.

We had 10 minutes before we left for Birkenau. The mood was incredibly sombre and even the usual banter was missing as everyone tried to come to terms with what we had just seen and heard. Yet even at this time I was able to gain some form of encouragement as I witnessed the crowds of schoolchildren from many countries waiting patiently to enter.

Birkenau

Auschwitz was a camp that worked people to death, Birkenau was a camp with one purpose – mass murder. The sheer size and scale of the camp was almost beyond comprehension. However, as with Auschwitz, it was the tales of personal tragedy, and in some cases triumph that were the most emotional aspect.

Nothing in life prepared me however for seeing myself standing on the same spot as the SS “Doctor” who watched those poor wretched people scramble off railway carriages after many, many days and then with a mere nod or shake of his head determined

their life or death.

As we entered one of the few surviving barracks it was difficult not to remember films and photos I have seen previously, but the reality was daunting. As was the fact that if any of the prisoners tried to leave the barracks at night, as many did because of diseases such as dysentery, they would be shot as potential escapees. The guard responsible received a day’s leave as a reward for his “bravery”.

As we proceeded towards the crematoria Pitör explained that the Nazis kept extending the railway line until it reached the actual entrance of the crematoria as it was “inefficient” for the prisoners to walk from the platform. As we looked upon the remains of both crematoria it was explained to us how the prisoners were persuaded to walk willingly to their death.

At every stage they were lied to. They were told they would eventually be allowed home - in fact most were given return rail tickets and upon liberation millions of return tickets were found. They were lied to right up until death. Fellow Jews reassured them as they entered the gas chambers even to the point of giving out pieces of soap and towels as they entered the “showers”. They also told them to hang their clothes on a numbered peg and to remember the number as they would need it after they had showered. It is impossible to imagine the absolute terror when they realised they were about to die. On some occasions they died standing up as they were packed in so tightly.

As our tour ended Pitör asked if anyone had any questions. No-one was capable of speaking. As we left, our TUC tutor Patrick managed to compose himself enough to ask Pitör a question: What was the suicide rate? Pitör was somewhat surprised and replied that it was very low as death was seen as a victory to the Nazis and that life was clung to as it was so precious.

I will never be able to adequately convey my feelings at that point. All I can say is that it truly was a life changing experience.

■ Dave Turner, Brigade Chair, Tyne and Wear

‘ENDLESS ROWS OF CHIMNEYS’

One of the first things we came across in Auschwitz was the main gate in which a message reads “Arbeit macht frei” (work brings freedom). We were quick to learn that this was the gate hundreds of prisoners passed through each day on their way to arduous shifts of 12 hours or more – not one prisoner was ever freed due to hard work.

Birkenau was where I got my first realisation of the number of people that came through these camps. The endless rows of chimneys left over from the wooden huts that had been burnt down by the Nazis in an attempt to cover up their war crimes, and the gas chambers which could kill up to 2,000 people every half an hour. As I stood shivering (in what was probably mild weather for Poland) with my jacket, hat and gloves I started to get a sense, if only slightly, of one of the less brutal factors, (the weather) facing the poor souls brought to these camps.

On the bus back from the camps the one thing I kept asking myself was how could one human do this to another? Tortured, starved and exhausted you started to imagine that the only thing on these prisoners’ minds was survival – at any cost.

Mandy Cregin

Auschwitz was a camp that worked people to death, Birkenau was a camp with one purpose – mass murder



Birkenau: endless rows of chimneys dominate the landscape.

CONCLUSIONS 'WE NEED TO WAKE UP'

The day after visiting the camps began in what can only be described as a pretty subdued atmosphere. We now knew what our tutor Patrick had meant when he had mentioned the school being emotional, challenging and disturbing.

We all - students and the tutors - told how we felt before, during and after the visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau. I don't think I've ever heard as many adjectives in a single conversation before. It was clear that the experience, while anything but pleasant, had been worthwhile. The visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau meant many different things to many different people and the thoughts and feelings of those concerned were obviously still very raw at the time. I have absolutely no doubt that all those who took part in the school will remember that day for the rest of their lives.

But, in my view, there was a more important outcome of the school. On the last day, during the Question Time debate, I played the part of an anti fascist and thought I had the high moral ground because I actually believed what it was I was trying to say. But it didn't turn out as I had expected.

If a group of committed trade unionists playing the part of right wing extremists can provide plausible, well thought out, well presented arguments (albeit lies and deception, normally hidden behind an emotive local issue) in such that a manner that committed trade unionists can see may seduce some people into supporting them, then we as an organisation, as part of the wider trade union movement, need to take a long hard look at ourselves. And we need to take a long hard

look at how we intend to combat the rise of organisations such as the BNP. We need to take a look at their tactics, the way in which they have changed their image, the way in which they have applied a thin veneer of respectability to themselves.

What we cannot afford to do is ignore them and think that they'll just go away - and recent election results confirm their enduring threat. It's not that if we don't act there will be another holocaust. But we could provide a platform for these organisations to spout their poison.

Scapegoats

There are certain circumstances which far right groups today seek to manipulate and they're not too dissimilar to those that existed in Germany and Italy in the early thirties. They prey on those who are concerned or affected by economic or social uncertainty, often blaming a particular section of society for everything that's 'wrong'. The German Jewish population was held responsible for the downfall of the German economy, despite the fact that this was a result of the destruction of the First World War, the subsequent war reparations and the 'Great Depression' following the Wall Street Crash. All of which was completely beyond the control of ordinary Jewish working people in pre-war Germany.

Today the far right blame the apparent economic and social decline on the uncontrolled influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants to the shores of the UK. This, despite the fact that the vast majority of immigrants

contribute to society - to the economy, public services and community relations. (And no, the numbers are far lower than organisations such as the BNP would have people believe!)

The media have played their part. Those editorial lines were drawn in the sand some time ago. But they have remained unaltered regardless of the fact that the facts and figures they have been using were discredited some time ago. They obviously work on the principal that the more they tell the readership the same old lies, the more likely they are to believe it. Unfortunately, as we discovered to our own cost not so long ago, it can work.

More importantly, the fact that the issues of immigration, asylum and integration are seen by the major political parties as a means of securing the vote has resulted in the whole subject being relegated to the lowest depths of debate. This allows the far right to promote even more extreme policies based on totally inaccurate and extremely devious misuse of information. And by not allowing a sensible, adult debate the major political parties are offering the far right the opportunity to determine the agenda on such subjects, thus giving them the legitimacy they crave.

The Government, the opposition and the other parties need to wake up, as do we.

After all, the far right can change their image as much as they like, as many times as they like in order to deceive the electorate. Luckily for us, we know what they're really all about. But knowing isn't good enough if we don't do something about it.

■ **Andy Noble**



Memorial, set between the ruins of the gas chambers, Birkenau

'There are certain circumstances which far right groups today seek to manipulate and they're not too dissimilar to those that existed in Germany and Italy in the early thirties'

'HOW WAS THIS ALLOWED TO HAPPEN?'

Even now, weeks later the visit is still having an impact upon me and I hope I will never again become blasé. To anyone reading this who has doubts about the holocaust, go and see it for yourself. Listen and look upon the artefacts, the gas chambers, the crematoria, the barracks, the photos and then ask yourself: how did this happen? how was this allowed to happen?

The Holocaust occurred within my parent's lifetime. It is not merely an historical footnote. It is vital now, today, that we never forget this happened and we never allow this to happen again. And then, and only then will those millions of deaths not have been in vain.

Dave Turner

'EVERYTHING ABOUT THE VISIT HAS TOUCHED ME'

The Nazi concentration camps and the rise of the far right during the 1940s was a period in history I knew little about. It wasn't something I ever studied at school. And I was from a younger generation and have no living relatives who experienced this period first hand. I was keen to see what it was about and how it was all tied into trade unionism.

Three weeks later and as I reach for some painkillers to knock the edge off a throbbing toothache I find myself still thinking back to the trip and how horrendous even the most basic illnesses in those conditions would be. Everything about the visit has touched me and taught me to appreciate some of the simplest things in life we take for granted.

Mandy Cregin

Schools following the format of the FBU North East Regional School are being considered by a number of FBU regions, with the first expected to be held in the autumn.

For more:

**www.uaf.org.uk,
www.searchlightmagazine.com**

CAMPAIGN IN FIRE SERVICE MOVES FORWARD

The Union has welcomed clearer language in the National Framework (Draft) Document 2008-2011 that calls on fire authorities to ensure that "all fire and rescue service staff and those applying to join are aware that membership of extremist groups is not compatible with employment in an organisation which serves the whole community."

However, it has called on the fire minister to issue National Guidance on this issue, which it described as "essential if the statements made in the Framework document are to be realised."

Following concerted efforts by the Union, led by its Black and Minority Ethnic Section (B&EMM), the draft of the latest National Framework document has placed the responsibility for compliance explicitly on fire authorities. The document, expected to be published this summer, states:

"In order to engender the trust and confidence of all sections of the community in the integrity of Fire and Rescue Authority employees and to meet their statutory obligations to promote equality, both in employment practices and service delivery, Fire and Rescue Authorities will need to ensure that... all staff and those applying to join are aware that membership of extremist groups is not compatible with employment in an organisation which serves the whole community."

At a meeting with the minister in February, the Union told the minister that they were pleased that there is a "clear statement" within the National Framework documents but that it was "unfortunate that there has been no national guidance to assist brigades in implementing the required changes that are required in order to ensure that this position is reinforced and embedded into policies and practices. National Guidance from CLG on this issue is essential if the statements made in



FBU on the march against today's fascists

the Framework document are to be realised."

The Union told the minister that in a survey conducted by B&EMM in 2005 most brigades expressed the desire to state their position with the same clarity as Avon FRS did at the time, to its credit, but this would leave them open to litigation. They also felt that national guidance from the ODPM (CLG now) would give them the confidence to make positive moves in this area.

Mick Nicholas, FBU Executive Council member for B&EMM, attended the meeting along with other representatives of B&EMM, the Union's other equality sections and National Officer John McGhee.

Mick Nicholas said:

"This is not just an issue about recruitment. This issue also potentially affects promotion procedures, service delivery, community engagement and operational intervention.

"Guidance from CLG will give brigades the confidence to write; implement and commit to this area.

"No guidance will see a continuing reactive position by brigades, where community perception of the fire and rescue service is potentially damaged for generations.

"To do nothing is not an option. The communities we serve depend on us."



Woman with FBU whistle at Rise London United anti-racist festival, 2005

→ In 2004, after the announcement by a Hampshire FRS employee that he would be standing for the BNP in the June European elections, the Union launched a campaign against the far-right in the UK fire and rescue service. More info (including Avon FRS' statement): www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/fairnesswork/



BACK ON THE WATCH

John Heenan had been a Glasgow firefighter for more than 20 years when he lost an eye in a cycling accident in January 2007. Soon after it happened, he had one clear goal in mind – to get back to the job he loved. And in March this year, with support from the FBU, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and fellow firefighters, he returned to work fulltime ...

One phrase sums up John Heenan's attitude to resuming his duties at Springburn station – "It's not if but when."

This determination to get back to Red Watch made a big impression on his friends, family and colleagues. It certainly impressed Jim Speirs, the union's brigade secretary for Strathclyde. "John is a very positive and strong-willed character. Right from the start it was 'not if but when'. It's an attitude that tended to rub off on those around him."

From the early days, Jim and the Union supported John in his journey back to full operational duties, liaising with management at Strathclyde Fire and Rescue.

When the accident first happened, John did not realise its severity. But once in hospital, doctors battled for six hours to save his left eye. It turned out to have been damaged irreparably when his bike hit a pothole and his head hit the handlebar.

He woke up with bad news. "I found they hadn't been able to save the eye and I thought I might lose my job," he told *Firefighter*. "I didn't have any doubts I'd still be capable of doing it, but it was whether Strathclyde would let me."

John realised he had a lot of convincing to do – even

admitting to himself he might well have been sceptical about the chances of a colleague who had lost an eye returning to full operational duties. But this was no time for self-doubt. He told the watch commander who visited him in hospital, Jim Speirs and numerous colleagues the same thing – he wanted to get back to his old job.

John's grit and resilience won people over – including Paul Austin, a Strathclyde Fire and Rescue group commander put in charge of co-ordinating his return to work in compliance with the Disability Discrimination

Act. The two soon developed a strong rapport – with Paul chivvying colleagues to get on with what was necessary to get John back to work.

Helping a frontline firefighter who had lost an eye back to work in compliance with the DDA was fresh territory for both the Union and Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and the

two worked together in a productive partnership.

For Paul Austin, giving John support and encouragement was an important part of his role as the process unfolded. Paul is quick to praise John's drive and patience: "There was a very robust process put in place by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue. John's competences as a firefighter were never in question. What we tried to do was put him through a process of activities related to his job as

'I didn't have any doubts I'd still be capable of doing it, but it was whether the brigade would let me'





PICTURES: STUART WILSON

a competent firefighter and to show how he would cope with his disability. And I can tell you he coped brilliantly.”

Under the DDA, employers have to make “reasonable adjustments” to equipment if this is needed to enable an employee to return to their job safely. In John’s case, this meant adapting headgear and issuing safety glasses to be worn at all times when on duty, to protect his remaining eye from damage.

Paul, recently retired from the FRS, was very keen to see John was heading back to his old job before he left. He says the process of getting him there was “a real exercise in partnership working with the FBU and different departments within Strathclyde Fire and Rescue.”

At the end of the process, the FRS had brought together “an extremely robust portfolio of evidence” spelling out John’s capabilities. “John more than convinced those who were unsure that he could

‘I was determined, got the support I needed and got what I wanted – to get back to my watch’

return to his own job. He was given no quarter when assessments were carried out. They were done so with the utmost rigour.”

For a month, John was monitored in off the run training scenarios by the officer in charge on different watches at Springburn station. Disciplines tested included working on uneven ground at night, going up and down ladders and reading gauges on the pump.

As John puts it: “Through all my training programmes, there was nothing that I had done before that I couldn’t do. The only difference now is I wear safety glasses to protect my good eye, and there are slight changes to my equipment when I’m wearing breathing apparatus.” He will have an eye test each year but there will be no continuous monitoring.

He’s very happy to be back in the job he loves and appreciates all the support he has received. “Jim Speirs worked hard for me on the Union side and Paul Austin on the management side to put everything in place to get me back to work. Colleagues at the station – especially my own watch – have been a huge support to me and my family.”

And his advice for a firefighter injured at work who wants to return to their job? “If you really want to give it a go and feel you can, stick with it. Not everyone will want to, and you will have to show you can still do your job. I was determined, got the support I needed and got what I wanted – to get back to my watch.”



John with his son

‘John more than convinced those who were unsure that he could return to his own job. He was given no quarter when assessments were carried out. They were done so with the utmost rigour’

A pain in the nose

For many people seasonal allergic rhinitis seriously affects their quality of life

HAYFEVER

Hayfever (seasonal allergic rhinitis) affects millions of people each year with sneezing, runny or blocked nose, itchy watery eyes, tiredness and irritability. Often dismissed as of no great importance, for many people hayfever seriously affects their quality of life. Hayfever occurs when the immune system mistakenly makes antibodies to 'fight off' pollen. These antibodies attach themselves to cells in the lining of the nose, eyes and airways. The reaction between pollen (the allergen) and antibody causes the release of histamine and other chemicals into the tissues of the nose and eyes. These chemicals cause the hayfever symptoms.

Histamine provokes sneezing, watery discharge, itching and redness of the nose or eyes, within a few minutes of contact with the pollen. Other chemicals trigger more delayed inflammation lasting many hours, causing the stuffy nose, difficulty in breathing and swelling around the eyes experienced by many hayfever sufferers.

Seasonal allergic rhinitis only occurs for part of the year because the particular 'trigger' pollen will only be present in the air during its specific season, which varies depending on location and the weather.

The most common allergy is to grass pollen, which has a season from May to September, peaking in June and July. Increasingly, people are becoming affected by allergy to other pollens that have different seasons. The tree pollen season runs from February to July, with birch pollen causing particular problems during April and May. Weeds produce pollen during the second half of the year (May to October).

Wind-pollinated

Mostly it is these wind-pollinated plants that cause allergy problems because the pollen is released in large amounts and is carried long distances by the wind. Insect-pollinated plant pollens such as those produced by most flowers, are heavier and stickier (designed to be carried by insects), and although these can trigger allergy, this is less common.

Some people will make antibodies against several pollens, so although most hayfever occurs in the summer months, they can be affected from spring through to the autumn. Other allergens such as mould spores,



Hayfever can occur within a few minutes of contact with pollen

housedust mites and pets can also cause 'hayfever' symptoms, although these will be present all the time, causing year-round symptoms (perennial allergic rhinitis).

Management of hayfever consists of identifying the relevant allergen, taking steps to avoid exposure as much as possible and using medication to control symptoms.

Many people will already know their allergic trigger because it is obvious from the

HAYFEVER: KEY POINTS

- ◆ Hayfever can affect you from early spring to late autumn
- ◆ It can also cause asthma in some people
- ◆ Hayfever medication should be taken regularly starting before the season begins
- ◆ Rarely, hayfever can be linked to itching and swelling of the mouth when eating certain foods – tell your GP if this happens

season in which their symptoms occur (grass in June and July, for instance). But where this is not clear, an experienced allergy clinician can usually work out the offending allergen by taking a detailed history from the patient.

Skin tests or blood tests are sometimes used to help confirm the diagnosis, or if the trigger allergen is uncertain. Pollen avoidance measures include not going out in the early morning or evening when pollen counts are highest, wearing wrap-around sunglasses, keeping windows closed, washing pollen off hair and changing clothes when coming indoors and using filter vacuum cleaners or air filters.

Antihistamines

Modern antihistamine tablets, liquids and eye drops are usually effective in reducing the symptoms of hayfever; they are generally taken once daily and do not make most people drowsy.

Cromoglicate eye drops and nasal sprays are also often effective as 'preventer' medication. Steroid nasal sprays are often helpful, especially at reducing stuffiness and congestion. Hayfever medications should be taken regularly, starting before the hayfever season arrives. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you.

In very severe cases, where medication and avoidance fails, desensitising treatment may be available from specialist clinics on referral from a GP.

→ Allergy UK is the leading national medical charity dealing with allergy and has a wealth of information about allergies including hayfever. Allergy UK can provide advice about tests and treatments, allergen avoidance and products that can help with managing symptoms. You can contact their helpline on 01322 619898, or visit www.allergyuk.org

Lodging an injury claim

Q How long do I have to lodge an injury claim with Thompsons after an accident or injury?

A The normal time limit for lodging a personal injury claim after an accident or injury is three years from the date of the accident or injury.

If legal proceedings are not started in court within three years, the case is then time-barred or statute barred as it is sometimes known.

But there are exceptions to that rule.

In the case of injuries the three-year deadline begins from the date that it was known the injury (typically work-related disease) was potentially linked to the original exposure. This is called the date of knowledge and it can be much later than the accident date.

Asbestos related diseases can take decades to develop. Sadly, fatal ones such as mesothelioma may not be diagnosed until after the sufferer is already very ill or has died.

The three-year deadline begins from the date the disease was known to be potentially linked to asbestos exposure or from the date of death. In this case it would normally be from the date an asbestos-related condition was confirmed.

If a person is part of the way through dealing with their personal injury compensation claim when they die, the three-year deadline begins again from the date of their death to allow their family to continue with the claim.

Another exception to the rule occurs if the injured person was a child at the time of the accident. In such a case, time does not begin to run until the child reaches 18.

For criminal injury claims,



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

evidence will be obtained in such a short period and the lack of evidence to support a case may then mean the case failing.

Q How long are any legal proceedings likely to take?

A Every personal injury claim is different and there are no hard and fast rules about how long it should take. There are protocols that are intended to ensure that both sides in a compensation claim respond to correspondence within certain time frames. Simple claims can be concluded in a matter of months. But in many cases defendants, such as the employer or insurer, ignore these.

This can mean that apparently straightforward claims that ought to take a few months because it is obvious who was at fault and the medical evidence is clear can take much longer.

Complex injury claims, where the long-term prognosis may not be known for some time, or disease claims where there are many possible sources of exposure, can take years to reach settlement simply because it is some years before the severity of the injury and its impact on future earnings can be established.

It will help to speed up your claim if you can help your solicitor with key information about your accident, such as dates, the names of witnesses, whether it was recorded in the accident book and if there had been previous similar accidents.

You should also keep records of all expenditure related to your claim, such as receipts for taxis to and from hospital and your GP and for payments for help around the house, all of which can be included in your compensation claim.

■ More on the claim process in the next issue.

→ 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.

Legal Beagle

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

such as assaults and injuries caused by arson, which are handled by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA), a strict two-year deadline applies.

Q Does the three-year time limit mean that I can delay contacting the FBU legal service?

A No. The earlier the FBU's lawyers can start investigating your accident or injury the better. This is because they will need to order medical reports to confirm the nature of the injury and to help establish its cause and the prognosis for recovery. They will also need

to contact witnesses to the accident.

It is much more difficult for our solicitors to prove that an injury was caused by another person's negligence and how much compensation should be payable (which is calculated on such things as loss of earnings and future loss of earnings resulting from the injury) if the evidence has 'gone cold' by the time the compensation claim is started.

In some cases, members leave it until close to the end of the three-year period. This simply means their case has less chance of success as the solicitor will only have a short period to gather evidence. Clearly less

‘I’m a massive fan myself’

Egged on by fellow karaoke night enthusiasts, Barry Paull developed an act that would become ‘Elvis A Tribute Fit For A King’

Barry Paull was weaned on Elvis – his mum was a fan and so were his aunts. So when he dropped into a local karaoke night near his home in Somerset, it was pretty obvious which artist he was going to choose when he picked up the mic.

But Barry – unlike most sing-along wannabes – actually has a voice worth shouting about. And it wasn’t long before an idea began to form in his mind. Why not take his love of The King to a level beyond karaoke – and craft an Elvis tribute act?

He was egged on by fellow karaoke night enthusiasts who would often “put their drinks down and turn their heads” when he took to the stage. “I did karaoke for several months back in 2000, and my confidence started to build,” he says.

He then began to dress, as well as sing in the style of Elvis. “It was all a bit cheesy to start with. Karaoke was hot so I launched myself as an Elvis tribute act, with a backing track. It went down well. Sometimes two or three people would get up and join me to sing Suspicious Minds or something. This act was to evolve, eventually, into ‘Elvis A Tribute Fit For A King’.

It’s Now or Never

“I worked hard at home practising – ask my long-suffering wife. But when you launch yourself as a singer in pubs and clubs, you’ve got to have two one-hour slots. With Elvis that can mean about 50 songs.” Barry got himself some representation and his bookings picked up, fuelled by word-of-mouth recommendations.

Until Autumn 2003, Barry was working full-time as a supervisor in an engineering factory. When he was 37 with 22 years service, management at the factory was trawling for voluntary redundancies. It was, as Elvis put it, a case of It’s Now or Never. He’d take a chance and see if he could make a living from celebrating Elvis.

“The Elvis nights were taking off. I just wanted to push it and see if I could pick up holiday parks mid-week and take it from there.

“I left the factory job in September and in

November I’d got a 33-week run every Tuesday night at Croyde Bay in Devon. Then cabaret nights started dropping into my lap. It meant I’d got a bit of security and didn’t have to go out chasing work every week.”

This increasing exposure meant yet more bookings – as holiday camp guests who’d enjoyed his set started asking if they could book him for weddings or private parties.

By 2005, Barry had honed his act further – and launched the Elvis Party Night. It’s an hour of classic Elvis songs followed by a disco – think Tiger Feet and Amarillo – mixed in with Barry once again in Elvis mode.

He’s played at the Dorset Steam Fair for the past five years and now gets bookings to perform at military balls and company thrashes.

Barry’s tribute show features songs from the whole of Elvis’s career. But, when it comes to costumes, it’s the Las Vegas years – particularly the clothes The King wore for the “Aloha from Hawaii” concert, beamed round the world in 1973, that Barry wears on stage.

At first they were run up by a local tailor. But as demand grew for “Elvis A Tribute Fit For A King”, Barry splashed out on authentic white replica Aloha costumes, which famously feature the American Eagle. He imports the suits





BARRY 'ELVIS' PAULL

Barry 'Elvis' Paull, a retained member at Ilminster, swaps his firefighting kit for authentic reproduction Elvis clothes in a tribute show that has packed 'em in from pubs to holiday parks. Now he'd like to use his act the raise funds for charity through a national tour.

from B and K Enterprises, holder of the worldwide licence, and now owns a staggering seven of them.

Barry doesn't just wear the clothes – he also moves around the stage a lot in the manner of late Elvis, which can be burn off quite a few calories.

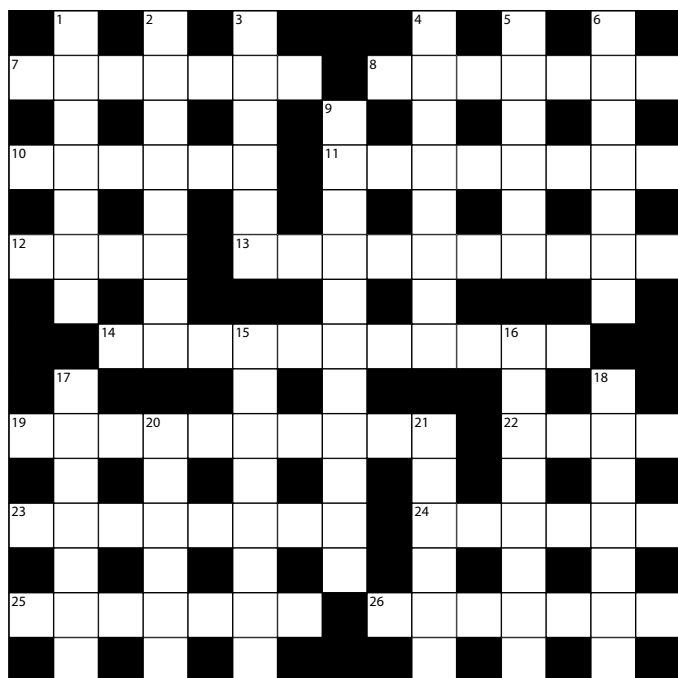
"Elvis moved around the stage quite a bit on stage and I tend to do the same to make it as authentic as possible, without going over the top. It will turn off Elvis fans if you're cheesy or they think you are taking the mickey. Which I think I've managed not to, because I'm a massive fan myself."

Barry is offering to tour "Elvis A Tribute Fit For A King" around the country next year to raise funds for the Firefighters Charity – the new name for the Fire Service National Benevolent Fund. All proceeds after costs would go to the fund. It's early days, but Carol Tilley, chief fundraiser for the charity said: "We are always on the look out for exciting, quirky new ways of raising funds and this sounds interesting."

Barry says he loves his job as an RDS firefighter. "It's good to give something back and feel you're being useful," he says. And it's quite compatible with his new-found on-stage career celebrating The King.

→ If you think you can help identify a local venue which would hold at least 200 people, contact Barry direct by emailing barry@paull1211.freemove.co.uk or on 07708 239470

Quick Crossword

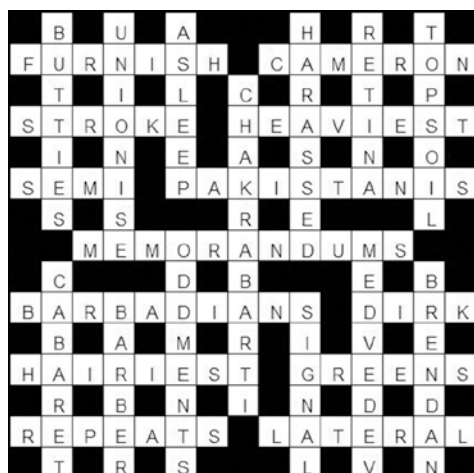


ACROSS

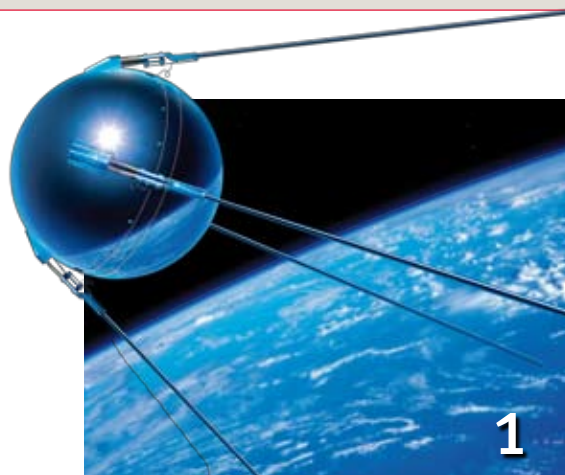
- 7** In short, they should be taxed! (3-4)
8 Disgraced New York governor (7)
10 Pongs (6)
11 Creator of moving cartoons (8)
13 Cried (4)
13 Overseer of vote (10)
14 Before time (11)
19 Five-pointed stars formed by five straight lines (10)
22 Dwelling in block (4)
23 National of former east European federated republic (8)
24 Precious metal (6)
25 Turn down; deteriorate (7)
26 Acute infectious viral disease (one of the Ms in MMR) (7)

DOWN

- 1** Absent-minded scribbles (7)
2 One who makes alterations - to insurance claims? (8)
3 Entertains; keeps occupied (6)
4 One who runs in short burst of speed (8)
5 Over-exert; pass through a sieve (6)
6 (7)
9 Tennis player who wants to be Czech after all (11)
15 Mixing, especially socially (8)
16 Dead (8)
17 Asylum seeker (7)
18 One who lays on the eats and drinks (7)
20 Mythical Scandinavian cave-dwellers (6)
21 Southern county (6)



Solution to April crossword

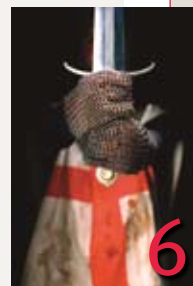


Prize Quiz

Win a studio photographic session

For you, family or friends. Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours

- What was the name of the first man-made satellite sent into orbit by the Soviet Union in 1957?
- Under which Roman Emperor was a great wall built across Britain?
- In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers sailed from Plymouth, England to North America in a ship called?
- What female French soldier was burned at the stake in Rouen, France in 1431 but was later declared innocent and canonised last century as a saint?
- In 1989 what East-West dividing wall was demolished?
- Which King of England was named Coeur-de-Lion (Lionheart)?



HOW TO ENTER

To win the studio photographic session please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 May 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May 2008) 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.

Answers to April quiz

- Kate Nash
- Take That
- Paul Weller
- 'A little less conversation a little more action'
- Richard Harris
- Detroit

Winner of the March quiz is Jon Watts of Cheltenham



StationCat

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

Strike a light!



I'm growing ever more concerned at what is going on in the minds of those inhabiting the happy planet that is the

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLoG). They have either uncovered a nest of highly trained, organised and motivated arsonists, or you can expect a dramatic new twist in the modernisation agenda.

First, let me familiarise you with the storyline of the futuristic novel *Fahrenheit 451*. In the book the fire service starts fires – mainly book burning – rather than puts them out.

Sheer fantasy you may think. But check out the alarming contents of a written Parliamentary Answer from fire minister Parmjit Dhanda [*Hansard*, 17 September, Parliamentary Answer 155519] using the search engine on the Parliament website.

In it he reveals that in each year since 1997 there have been more than 45,000 part time and full time FIRELIGHTERS on the loose in England.

17 Sep 2007: Column 2185W

Mr. Dhanda: The number of part-time and full-time firefighters(1) in England in each year since 1997 was as follows. Information on the number of firefighters at the constituency level is not available:

(1) Number of uniformed personnel

As at 31 March	Retained (part-time)	Whole – time (full-time)
1997	13,016	32,033
1998	12,847	31,855
1999	13,022	31,918
2000	13,021	31,616
2001	13,097	31,597
2002	13,013	31,592
2003	13,044	31,614
2004	13,015	31,856
2005	13,543	31,051
2006	13,927	30,744

I'd be very worried if I lived in Northamptonshire. In the same written answer Mr Dhanda went on: "The number of part-time and full-time firefighters(1) in Northamptonshire in each year since 1997 was as follows" and estimates there were

around 560 firefighters in that county alone.

Be afraid, be very afraid. I'm not sure which part of the role map covers firefighting (which appeared three times in one very short answer). Perhaps the civil servants need to check the answers being put down in the name of ministers.

Spult wrang



It is not the first time DCLoG has failed to spot budly spilled wurdz.

The Select Committee in its review of the Department's Annual Report 2006 noted that, despite a 2 month delay in finalising the report, it had produced a "sub-standard" document that contained numerous errors of fact, typography and proof-reading.

The select committee's review of the department's annual report in 2007 thought things were getting better. **They haven't spotted "firelighter" yet.**

Silent Prescott



What remains of the political career of John Prescott MP for Hull is shuffling to a close. Mind you, he is still being paid to represent his constituents.

You would think he may be at the front of the queue to vocally condemn Humberside FRAs proposals to close four fire stations and implement other cuts.

I can't find a word from Prescott spoken in opposition to the plans, although most of the other local MPs – of all political parties – have spoken out.

Maybe he is a polite boy who knows not to speak with his mouth full. Having claimed food and grocery expenses of £4,000 in one year (enough to feed a family of four) his mouth may be permanently full of pies, making speaking difficult.

It appears the trick to get him to open his mouth is to pay him huge sums of money.

The MPs register of interests shows two payments so far in 2008 in excess of £5,000 each for speech fees.

One of these was a speech to the British Mortgage Senate who also paid for flights, transfers, hotel and hospitality for Prescott and his wife. Why the British Mortgage Senate was meeting in Monte Carlo, only they know.

The thought of paying to listen to John Prescott destroy our native language seems laughable. But he is also chancing his arm in the printed word.

The register of interests also shows two payments in excess of £60,000 each, down payments "for autographical book". Enough for a pile of pies that will keep him quiet until retirement.

Unhappy Planet DCLoG



Some within DCLoG are very unhappy with my portrayal (there was a bit of feet-stamping during my last encounter) of it being anything other than being a Mary Poppins of an organisation: practically perfect in every way. For some the happy pills work wonders, for others not.

As the select committee pointed out in its review of the last CLG annual report: "We remain concerned about the perceived existence of bullying, harassment and discrimination. **Two years of work has brought no appreciable improvement, in spite of the time and money spent on courses** and the clear desire of senior managers in the Department to solve a chronic problem. Nor can the department or the permanent secretary be complacent on the grounds that other departments perform just as badly."

Those two years of work had followed a 2005 ODPM (before its renaming) survey that reported that 10 per cent of staff (one in ten) felt they had been bullied, 8 per cent had experienced discrimination and 6 per cent had reported harassment.

Alarm bells



National politicians are often quick to point out the drain on resources of attending false fire alarms, particularly the repeat offenders. You may think a false alarm is a rare occurrence in the new Portcullis House, scene of many a Select Committee hearing.

Between May 2005 and November 2007 the fire alarms went off 28 times in that very building. Five were caused by contractors or maintenance work, four by engineers working on the system, eleven were system faults, five were accidental. Only three were genuine fires.

25-year badges



Station Manager Russ Vaughan (r) of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service receives his 25-year badge from Grant Mayos, FBU Wales Regional Secretary



Paul Haywood (r) of Rugby Fire Station receives his 25-year badge from Steve Roberts, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service Vice Chair



Andy Butcher (l), Area Manager, receives his 25-year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack at Colchester Fire Station, Essex



Laurie Smith (r), Rugby Fire Station, receives his 25-year badge from Steve Roberts, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Vice Chair



Bryan Hood (r) Leighton Buzzard fire station receives his 25-year badge from Pat Carberry, NGLC Secretary and Vice Chair Bedfordshire



Alan Hendry (r) Leighton Buzzard Fire Station, Bedfordshire receives his 25-year badge from Pat Carberry, NGLC Secretary and Vice Chair Bedfordshire



Mick Soar (r), Green Watch, Colchester, Essex receives his 25-year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack



Steve Wade (r) Leading Firefighter, Green Watch, Colchester, Essex receives his 25-year badge from Pete Holding, Branch Secretary, Colchester



Dick Nunn (r), Group Manager, receives his 25-year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack at Colchester Fire Station, Essex



Martin O'Keefe (r) White Watch, Colchester, Essex receives his 25-year badge from General Secretary Matt Wrack

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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

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk

Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.