



SAFER FIREFIGHTERS SAFER COMMUNITIES



**Defend our Fire Service
Rally and Lobby**

Wednesday 21st October 2009

**Central Hall Westminster,
Storey's Gate, London, SW1H 9NH**

followed by lobbying of MPs at the House of Commons

Please make sure your branch is represented

A message from the General Secretary



We are facing a number of very serious attacks on our service. This is the first in a series of bulletins which will outline these attacks in more detail and will present our alternative. I hope you will take time

to read these bulletins over the next few months and will think about attending our rally and lobby of Parliament on October 21st.

Under attack: Jobs, Shifts, Conditions

The real reason behind the various attacks we face is a drive to cut costs. The recent Budget provided no good news for firefighters.

In detailed Budget papers, Government claimed that a further £110 million could be saved by changes to shift systems and crewing arrangements. The truth is that such savings are only made by cutting jobs – and that does not improve our service in the slightest.

It is also a scandal that the Government's cuts agenda is entirely focused on front line operational services – these cuts will mean a worse emergency response service for the public and worse employment conditions for firefighters.

But across the UK, FBU members have been fighting back. In South Yorkshire, our members are resisting the imposition of new duty systems. In Tayside recently we won a campaign to defend fire cover at Balmossie Fire Station. In Essex, our members are currently launching a campaign against a range of attacks on our conditions and on emergency cover. In Greater Manchester we have just launched a campaign against a further round of cuts. Our rally in October is an opportunity to draw all these campaigns together.

The attack on our Control members

FBU members working in Emergency Fire Controls in England face a major attack from the Government's regionalisation plan. This threatens hundreds of jobs. It also threatens the level of service provided to the public and the level of essential support which can be provided for fire crews at incidents.

The truth is the government department

responsible (CLG) completely misunderstands the role of Emergency Fire Controls. Chief Fire Officers, who have kept quiet on the issue for too long, are starting to realize that the service envisaged by CLG is more limited and far worse than is currently provided.

Regionalisation threatens the quality of service provided. It also threatens the work conditions of FBU members. Many face the prospect of seeing their jobs abolished. Those who remain face a series of attacks on pay and conditions.

It is a disgraceful fact that Government and employers see the proposals for regionalisation as an opportunity to slash pay, scrap conditions of service and force through new duty systems.

Our Control members are being treated terribly by our employers. There is a lot of talk in the Fire Service about teamwork. Unfortunately, this means nothing to those who belittle the work of our Control members and justify that to attack pay and conditions.

But the majority of those who work in the service – members of the Fire Brigades Union – take teamwork seriously. That is why the next phase of this campaign will be around the theme **Part Of The Team**.

Our Fire Controls are essential to the efficient functioning of our service and Fire Control Staff are an essential part of the Fire Service Team. The FBU stands ready to defend this group of members and I am confident that all our members will understand why we need to do so and will give the support required. This may ultimately mean the need for industrial action but we are asking you to get involved now, the more pressure we can apply politically the more likely we are to be able to avoid such a step.

Fake 'modernisation' and the battle for standards in our service

What lies behind many of the attacks we face is the slow fragmentation of our service. The so-called 'modernisation agenda' is increasingly leading to the fragmentation of our service and our profession. Among other things this agenda is leading to:

- A post code lottery for the public in emergency response standards;
- Different standards of training provided to firefighters – from trainee onwards;

- Fire engines introduced without any national standard or guidance – often turning out to be costly failures;
- Different operational procedures adopted by different services;
- A mish-mash of differing regimes for the enforcement of legislative fire safety and the resulting downgrading of this essential area of work.

This complete lack of standards from the top and the resulting fragmentation is allowing local Fire Authorities and Chief Fire Officers to attack our service and press for cuts. If there are no standards to meet they think they can justify anything on the basis of 'local determination' of needs. But the truth is that the cuts that we are facing are not based on any adequate assessment of local risk – they are cost driven and that is all. In far too many cases the local Integrated Risk Management Plans have completely failed to adequately assess local risks and the response needed to address those risks.

The FBU is the professional voice of firefighters. We seek the best service for the public and seek to

ensure the safest and most efficient ways to deliver such a service. That cannot be done under the current regime of locally decided, anything-goes fragmentation. Our battle for proper standards within our service is part and parcel of the battle against the cuts.

This is a fight which will not be won overnight. The government's 'modernisation' agenda introduced the biggest changes in our service for sixty years. But if we are to defend our service and our professionalism we have no choice but to campaign to ensure that our voice is heard.

Our rally in October follows a very successful rally and lobby last November around the issue of firefighter fatalities. The Government was forced to take notice of us and has started a review of training; introduced new structures for looking at operational procedures; agreed to look at how firefighter deaths and other serious incidents are monitored.

This was an excellent start to our campaign to turn the tide. But the battle is only just beginning. Our rally in October is the next stage. Please play your part.

Comment from Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Council member for Control Staff



Part Of The Team

The FBU has rightly decided to campaign around Safer Firefighters, Safer Communities. It is vital that all those within the service and outside realize the integral part which our Firefighter Control members play in helping to deliver safer firefighters and safer communities.

Part of the Team says it all. You will all have first hand experience of that teamwork whether you are

a Firefighter or a Firefighter (Control). That crucial bit of information passed to you via the radio on the way to a job. The fire survival advice given to callers to keep them calm and make them as safe as possible, whilst trapped by fire, enabling Firefighters to effect quick and successful rescues. Additional information gleaned from a caller by professional questioning, or by pure local knowledge also often helps save precious seconds.

We are there in the most desperate of times when people need us and we form part of that initial intervention, **Part Of The Team**. Sadly this is something which the CLG fail to recognize believing they can replace us with IT solutions in what will become a call centre. However, because we are part of the team we know that we have your support and I hope you will all be able to join with us at branch and regional meetings, in the political campaigning, leading up to the Lobby on 21st October. Let's show the Government what we can do when we work as a Team.

What can you do to help?

Over the next four months, FBU officials will be touring the country to explain the case for defending our service and how our campaign can start to turn the tide. This will involve:

Meetings in every brigade

By the end of July officials from Head Office and officials representing our control members aim to visit the first four regions facing the first stage of FireControl regionalisation. These are the **South West, North East, East Midlands and the West Midlands**.

Branch meetings

Every branch should meet over the next few months to discuss the attack on our control members. Further bulletins will be issued shortly dealing specifically with this issue. Branches are asked to meet again after the summer to discuss progress on this issue and progress towards the lobby.

Contacting local politicians

Brigade officials will shortly be provided with information packs to assist the lobbying of members of local Fire and Rescue Authorities. They should be asked for their opinion on the role of Control Staff and whether they will commit themselves to supporting the maintenance of jobs, terms and conditions.

Website

Please check the FBU website for updates on this campaign.

E-mail/contact your MP

The FBU website includes a very simple system for lobbying Members of Parliament. This will be updated to take account of the latest stage of this campaign. Please take two minutes to lobby your MP and support FBU members working in our Emergency Fire Controls.



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www.fbu.org.uk