



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT
POLITICAL STRATEGY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2007

In 2004 the Fire Brigades Union Annual Conference voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. This was a hotly debated issue and the outcome undoubtedly reflected the anger of FBU members at the Union's treatment during the 2002/3 Pay campaign.

The decision to disaffiliate did not, of course, mean the end of the Union's political involvement. As our Rule Book makes clear, the Fire Brigades Union has always seen itself as a part of the wider working class movement and has seen the need to play a part in broader politics at local, national and international level. This has been the case since 2004 and will continue to be so.

1. Parliamentary Work

The Union's Parliamentary Group has been firmly established over the past three years and currently has 44 members. All the members of this group are Labour Party MPs. The Parliamentary Group has proved invaluable in a number of areas of work including;

- Campaigning against the Regionalisation of Emergency Fire Controls
- Supporting members involved in local disputes
- Challenging departmental policy where appropriate
- Obtaining information and statistics which are difficult to obtain through other means.

The Group has also assisted in a number of wider campaigns such as that around the Trade Union Freedom Bill.

It is essential that this work continues and is developed. It is recommended that during 2007 further work is done to ensure that membership of the Group grows and that links are developed and improved between members of the Group and local Brigade and Regional Committees. This will assist the Union in local campaigning around issues such as IRMP cuts, Health and Safety etc.

2. The Devolved Administrations

In the devolved administrations (Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) the responsibility for Fire Policy has been removed from the Westminster Government. The three Regions affected have already developed strategies to engage with local politicians and this has met with a measure of success. During 2007 this work will need to be developed. Consideration will need to be given to whether Assembly/Parliamentary Groups could be developed along similar lines to the Group at Westminster. Dealing with devolved powers is a relatively new challenge for the Union and may mean that additional resources will need to be directed to the three Regions affected.

3. Political Education and Training

As Public Sector workers the pay and conditions of FBU members are determined by political decisions, albeit decisions taken within the constraints determined by the wider social and economic situation. It is essential therefore that FBU Officials at all levels

have a sound grasp of the political process. This should include Fire and Rescue Service funding, decision making, the establishment of central policy, lobbying etc.

This has always formed a part of the Union's Education and Training programme. This needs to be developed to take account of such changes as devolution, the shift to the DCLG in England, new targets set for the Service etc. Training and Education will be developed to take account of these issues and will make use of the assistance which can be provided by the Parliamentary Group and other supportive politicians.

4. The Labour Party question

The decision to disaffiliate has not ended debate around this issue. Concern has been expressed that disaffiliation has closed a number of doors to the Fire Brigades Union. There can be no denying that there are differences in operating as a non-affiliate to the situation prior to 2004. However, the situation we have faced has not been as cataclysmic as some predicted.

Nevertheless, it is right that the Union should continue to debate its political direction and this will inevitably include the issue of possible re-affiliation to the Labour Party. In order that this debate is conducted in a systematic and constructive manner the Executive Council will, during 2007, arrange a structured debate involving discussion at local and national schools, debates at local Committees and the production of discussion material through the pages of Firefighter and elsewhere.

5. Key Targets for 2007/8

- To build membership of the FBU Parliamentary Group
- To examine the possibility of similar groups in the devolved administrations
- To discuss at Executive Council level and with Regions 1, 2 and 8 the issue of devolution and the requirements and challenges for the Union around this issue
- To provide Education and Training in relation to the political process, lobbying etc.
- To organise a structured debate on the Union's political direction.