



Volume 32 No. 3 April 2004

FIRE FIGHTER



The future
of Controls

EDITORIAL

You – the members – decide



THE members decide. That's a fundamental democratic principle of this Union. It's a principle we have followed throughout the long and hard pay campaign. And it is the guiding principle underpinning the Executive Council's decision to launch a consultative ballot on where we are now in negotiations on implementation of Stage 2 of the June 2003 Pay Agreement, alongside the usual Branch meetings.

These negotiations addressed four key areas – NJC Constitution, Disputes Procedures, IPDS and the Grey Book – which were outstanding since last November. And it was lack of agreement on these matters that became the excuse – wrong and provocative as it was – given by National Employers to deny our full 7% at that time.

The proposed changes which were

outlined in the material sent to your home address contain some benefits for FBU members. There are some things that are less advantageous. By the time you read this, you will have given your views and we will know the outcome.

If the collective decision is to accept – and individual employers are being consulted as well as FBU members – then the understanding is that the 3.5% will be paid out (backdated, of course, to November 2003) as soon as practically possible after the April 5 closure of the ballot. It also means we will be able to focus energies on getting Stage 3 (4.2%) paid from July in a timely manner.

In the meantime we still have a range of other issues to deal with. Not least of them are the Government's plans to regionalise Emergency Fire Controls. Emergency Fire Control Staff were

looking at these proposals at a recent seminar with a view to taking forward a coherent and effective campaign.

In addition to this, there is plenty to be done around Integrated Risk Management Planning. The consultation period for the first round of IRMPs has now closed. FBU officials throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland submitted preliminary observations on these draft IRMPs and in a few notable cases local Fire Authorities have engaged in constructive dialogue with the local FBU based on our contributions.

However, far too many Fire Authorities appeared content to disregard the observations made by those in the frontline who know best and they signed up to their draft IRMP unaltered. Many may well regret those decisions.



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This cavalier approach to Community Fire Safety by many Employers should come as no surprise to most of us who have battled through the smash and grab campaigns. Nor, after the pay dispute, should we be too shocked that the Government also continues to ignore the reality on the ground in the UK Fire and Rescue Service in an apparent bid in many areas to push through change for changes sake.

Take for example, the most recent fire statistics for the UK. Fire deaths fell by 5% year on year to the lowest level since 1961. This significant reduction should have been welcomed by Government, yet ministers made no comment.

The media release from the ODPM announcing the news was as dull as it could be and no attempt was made by the Government communications machine to push the story or secure any coverage for the good news. If this success had concerned the health service, education or crime, spin doctors would have had the machine on maximum spin cycle.

But not for the Fire and Rescue Service. This is a real and honest success. Everyone in the Service – with FBU members first and foremost – should be praised for it and proud of it. Perhaps they do not want to draw attention to it because they are worried next year's figures will not look so good by comparison.

Of course, we know in the FBU better than anybody that there is no room for complacency. It would appear that non-accidental fire deaths are actually increasing. Serious consideration needs to be given to address this problem before it becomes a trend. Every Firefighter and Emergency Fire Control Operator knows from direct experience that in cases of deliberate fire-setting, speed of response and weight of attack are critical in saving lives and reducing property and other losses.

To help push forward our agenda of Zero Fire Deaths, next month the FBU will be publishing detailed proposals. These proposals should ensure that Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority Chiefs across the country can build a balance and focus into their IRMPs so that they will stand scrutiny from both a health & safety and risk-reduction perspective.

The proposals should also mean that they can actually reduce fire damage and save more lives. And that, I think even Employers will have to concede, is what in the Fire and Rescue Service we are all here for.

Andy Gilchrist



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NEWS IN BRIEF

TUC CHALLENGES LABOUR TO PRODUCE VISION OF WORK

In its response to the Labour Party's Big Conversation, the TUC has challenged the Party to produce a programme for the workplace in its manifesto for the third term that goes beyond the welcome near full employment achieved by the Government, to set out an ambition to make all jobs into well-rewarded quality jobs in organisations where people are treated fairly.

The TUC submission, "The place of work in a fairer Britain" says that "in 1997 Labour pledged to tackle low pay and low skills, saying that Britain had no future as a low wage economy and that Britain needed to win on higher quality, skills, innovation and reliability.

"Almost seven years on, that remains the case and what is more, unfairness is still endemic in Britain's workplaces. This is something that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and it is on that basis that we make this submission."

While the TUC welcomes many Government achievements, it says that action is needed on a range of issues:

- Moves to bring the two million who want to work, but do not show in unemployment figures, back to the labour market.
- A radical reform of the pensions system to ensure that Government, employers and employees form a new partnership to provide a decent pension for all.

- A major new training initiative aimed at making as big an impact on the employed workforce as the New Deal has done for the unemployed. There needs to be new compulsions on employers to train and a new union-led institution should have a major role in delivering training.

- A new determination to improve the quality of working life with action to tackle inequalities such as the gender pay gap, a major new investment in childcare and a crackdown on our long hours culture, to provide better work-life balance and better rights at work.

- More recognition of the importance of manufacturing and European levels of support.

- A renaissance of the public sector ethos to deliver highest quality public services with an end to the two tier workforce across the public sector.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "No one should doubt the positive changes at work since 1997, but there is much unfinished business and some that has not even been started.

"Work is where most of us spend a large part of our waking hours and in this document unions are challenging Government to spell out how they will make work a better place to be."

www.tuc.org.uk

PENSIONERS' MANIFESTO LAUNCHED

The National Pensioners' Convention (NPC), a pensioners' campaign group

headed by former Unison General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe has unveiled a manifesto that calls for substantial rises in the state pension and an end to means testing.

President Bickerstaffe wants would-be MPs to endorse it. "This unique exercise in pensioner power will no longer mean that older people can either be ignored or taken for granted," he said. The manifesto has been drawn up by more than 800 groups following the "biggest consultation exercise ever staged amongst older people".

The final document will be approved by the Pensioners' Parliament next month and then sent to all prospective Parliamentary candidates.

The wide-ranging demands cover healthcare, pensions and mobility. They include:

- Raising the basic state pension to £105.45 a week for a single pensioner and £160.95 for a couple from April (it is due to rise to £79.60 and £127.25 respectively)
- Removing means testing from pensions and benefits
- State pension to be linked to average earnings or inflation, whichever is greater, so pensioners share in national prosperity
- Free annual health checks and long-term care
- A £200 increase for every pensioner household in the winter fuel allowance, with £100 extra for over-80s
- The creation of a National Older Persons Commission to scrutinise legislation and make recommendations to Parliament.

The NPC says politicians

cannot afford to ignore Britain's 11million people aged over 60, as a very high share of them will turn out to vote. It brands as "shocking" the quality of life in many care homes and is worried that almost 800 residential homes have closed in recent years.

www.bbc.co.uk

UNION MEMBERSHIP RISING

Official figures reveal that trade union membership increased by 30,000 to 7.4 million last year. The proportion of workers in unions rose slightly to 29.1 % over the year, according to research by the Office of National Statistics.

The greatest union density was in Northern Ireland, where 39 % of all workers were members, followed by Wales and the Northeast with 38 % and Scotland with 35 %

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber commented: "The hard organising and recruiting work of trade unions is paying off. This shows that people still feel unions can play an important role in their working life, but there is no room for complacency."

Mr Barber's warning was given by the figures which showed that membership was still highest among older workers and full-time employees.

Many unions are now looking at ways to better target young and part-time workers in recruitment drives.

www.poptel.org.uk/morning-star

HEALTH & SAFETY

Asbestos: the workplace WMD

The last phase of new regulations on the control of asbestos in the workplace is coming into force next month, but employers are lagging behind in compliance

THE Health and Safety Executive estimates that 3,000 people die each and every year from asbestos induced diseases, such as mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. This is 25% more than die in road accidents. Worse still the number of these very painful deaths is predicted to rise significantly over the coming years.

The Asbestos Prohibition Regulations 1992 banned the importing into Britain of, and the supply and new use of, all products containing asbestos. Notwithstanding this, the legacy from the past is a very large challenge for the present. If future generations are to be spared the human suffering and misery that has condemned 1% of all males born in the 1940's to a painful death, then action is needed now. Yet the evidence shows that, even now, employers are largely ignorant of their new obligations.

LEGACY OF THE PAST

Asbestos was used extensively in the construction industry for 150 years. The TUC estimates that 850,000 commercial properties in the U.K. contain asbestos, which amounts to about 85% of all workplaces.

Asbestos is hazardous to human health when the fibers within the material are allowed to escape into the air. This happens when material is broken, sawn, drilled, sanded and especially damaged in the workplace.

One thousandth of a millimetre is a micron. Asbestos dust can contain fibres as small as 5 microns long and 3 microns in



Preparing to remove asbestos

diameter so that they will not be visible to the naked eye.

Even small amounts of asbestos dust is hazardous to health because the fibres are of such a size and shape that they can be easily inhaled, quickly penetrating the airways and tissues of the lungs.

NEW REGULATIONS

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 (S.I.2675 of 2002) mostly came into force 21 November 2002, but the coming into force of one key part of these Regulations (Reg 4) was phased to allow employers – or anyone with maintenance obligations or control of

a non-domestic building – time to comply. This is to come into force 21 May 2004. It imposes on them a duty to manage asbestos, yet there is scant evidence that the majority of employers have done so.

Laid before Parliament 31 October 2002 the Regulations therefore gave employers and those with control of any non-domestic building, the best part of 19 months notice of their new obligations.

These require employers to find out whether their building contains asbestos and what condition the asbestos is in. They then have to assess the risk; the likelihood of asbestos fibres being released into the atmosphere; record their findings; make plans to manage that risk including giving information to employees and the emergency services, and the safe removal of it where necessary.

EMPLOYERS NOT READY

Despite a concerted campaign by the TUC and the HSE to raise awareness, a recent survey by Zurich Risk Services shows that only 27% of businesses had plans in place to comply. Nearly half were ignorant of the existence of their new obligations. Larger companies were more likely to know and have plans in place, but even so, the level of inaction so close to the deadline is a cause for very considerable concern.

The same survey showed that two thirds of companies described the threat to health from asbestos as a major concern and nearly a half were worried about the effects on their business. Yet some of these companies themselves must be the ones that are without any plans to deal with their new obligations!

WHAT CAN I DO?

As an active Trade Unionist you can and should enquire of the employers what steps they have taken to be ready to comply. 850,000 potential sources of future human suffering and misery is the big challenge for today to prevent untold misery tomorrow.

This article, which was published in the latest issue of The Bulletin – Lawyers for Unions, was written by Martin Bare.

EDUCATION

The future of Fire and Rescue Service Controls

Control staff activists have been looking at how to oppose the Government's bully boy plans to impose fewer, larger Control Centres, reports Sharon Peverett

A CONTROL Seminar was held at Wortley Hall on 24 February to discuss how to oppose the Government's proposals on Emergency Fire Control Centres.

Reps from across the country attended. The Control Staff National Committee is putting the finishing touches to our response document to the Mott MacDonald report and this will be circulated shortly.

Regional Seminars are being planned and we urge everyone to get involved as this is not just a battle for the Emergency Fire Control Staff. This is a fight we must win for the future of our Fire and Rescue Service.

Modernisation is a word used by the Government to introduced new practices into the Fire and Rescue Service, which to us who work within the Service means one thing – cuts to our jobs, but even more importantly, cuts to the response we can make to the public when we are needed. Remember: firefighting begins with 999.

The Mott MacDonald Report of 2003 (www.odpm.gov.uk), a reworking of the 2000 report by the same author, proposes nine Regional Control Centres instead of the current 46 Brigade Controls in England.

Suggestions that three Control Centres in Wales should become one have also been made. Scotland is also under review.

Chief Fire Officers and local Fire Authorities have been told that if they do not comply then it will be imposed upon them by Central Government. Sounds familiar. So how do we oppose their bully boy tactics?

We need to get out to the public and let them know what is happening to the

Fire and Rescue Service and that this proposal can only mean a worse service to the public. We need not look any further than what "modernisation" has done to hospitals and the ambulance service.

How many times have you requested an ambulance only to be told that the nearest ambulance is coming from miles away? Why are the Government so keen to use the Fire Service as fire responders? Because the ambulance service has been underfunded for years.

We need to get out to the public and let them know what is happening to the Fire and Rescue Service and that the Mott MacDonald proposals can only mean a worse service to the public

Many people do not realise that when they dial 999 for fire that their call is answered in a Brigade Control. They assume it goes to the local fire station. They are unaware that Control monitor the availability of all the Brigade's resources and respond to anything occurring within their area and very often giving assistance to neighbouring Brigades.

Not only do Emergency Fire Control Staff do this, but they are also responsible for collecting and collating data, answering telephone calls both from the general public and from firefighters

and officers. And they monitor incidents to safeguard and assist the firefighters. On top of this, they have to train for new mobilising computer systems and mobilising practices (IRMPs) and New Dimension incidents.

The Mott MacDonald report suggests that one large Regional Control (responsible for several Brigades) would be better placed to deal with this than several smaller Controls sharing the workload. The added danger of this is that a Regional Control would be even more of a terrorist target as it would prevent rescue operations being properly co-ordinated and cause problems with mobilising. Has the Government ever heard the expression "all your eggs in one basket"?

Many Chief Fire Officers are totally unaware of how their Control works and have no idea how often the Emergency Fire Control Operator has to change their computer response before they mobilise, or how often they use their local knowledge to identify the location a caller is talking about.

All of this would be much more difficult in a large Control covering several Brigade areas. Most important though, would be the need to change practices within Brigades so that all are doing the same. Before you know it, it's not just a Regional Control but a Regional Fire Service.

Speaking at the seminar to some of the Emergency Fire Control Operators – from Derbyshire, Essex and Merseyside to name but a few Brigades – they told me they had walked out three times to support others but this time they would be doing it for their jobs. This time we are asking you for your involvement.

Sharon Peverett is the Region 10 Rep on the FBU's Control Staff National Committee

Defending political unity

Building on the success of last year's Labour Party conference requires the involvement of all trade unionists, particularly those in the FBU, argues Tony Woodley

THE firefighters' struggle for pay justice in 2002-03 was an inspiration to the entire labour movement. The FBU's solidarity and strength in support of a pay claim which, even if met in full, would be no more than brave men and women performing an essential service for our community deserve, was in the finest traditions of British trade unionism.

So I can fully understand the disappointment – even rage – which many FBU members feel at the Government for its attitude towards the dispute. Ministers' response to the claim was irresponsible and intransigent, blocking the possibility of a reasonable settlement at every turn.

Still worse, if possible, was some of the rhetoric from leading Government figures. Such abuse of a trade union in a legitimate dispute has no place in our labour movement. Those who took part in it should be ashamed of themselves.

Yet I want to argue here that the right response to Government behaviour is to take back our Party, not walk away from it.

Several things lead me to believe that this is no time for any trade union, including the FBU, to be turning its back on the Labour Party.

First, such a move will damage the trade union movement far more than the Government. It could mean the beginning of the end of the unity of British trade unions under one political umbrella.

Who wants to see trade unionists supporting separate candidates in elections? Yet that is the danger if we start to fragment. A historic gain for the British

working class – its political unity – would be thrown away.

Second, there is no other single political vehicle to which a trade union could transfer its support. Instead, a variety of different political persuasions would start squabbling for control of, or access to, a union's political fund.

My guess is that the Liberal Democrats or even Tories might end up as the long-term beneficiaries. The unity of each union within itself would come under additional strain.

Third, the balance of opinion in the trade union movement has, over the last year or two, swung sharply against "New Labour". The Government's handling of the Fire Service dispute was a major factor in this, as has been the war in Iraq, foundation hospitals, top-up fees etc.

At last year's Party conference, trade union affiliates pulled together to start fighting for a collection of policies meeting our members' interests on jobs, employment law, privatisation and pensions. We won the vote on the issue of foundation hospitals.

This is not going to undo the damage done to Labour over the last ten years overnight. But it shows that the tide is turning. We have a clear message for Ministers – listen or lose.

No doubt there are some in No 10 or Labour HQ who might like to see the unions walk away from Labour. That would leave them insulated from working class pressure and free to pursue a love-in with big business.

So we would end up losing our existing



Tony Woodley: Turning your back on the Labour Party will damage British trade unions far more than the Government.

Party once and for all while failing to create anything new and viable.

Labour, at its grass-roots, remains a Party of working people, built up over the years by the endeavours of millions of trade unionists and socialists. Our task now is to put Labour back into the Party and dump New Labour's third-way one-nation dogma.

That's not just words. I am committed to leading all Labour's affiliates in an effort to return Labour to its basic values and principles. We also aim to restore real democratic procedures in the Party, giving our unions a stronger policy-making input at all levels.

Building on what was achieved at last year's Party conference we are working to advance our agenda of real Labour policies.

To carry this forward we need the help of all trade unionists, particularly those in unions with such a proud and militant tradition as the FBU. Those of us who are fighting to restore Labour to its true values need FBU members in there alongside us.

So I ask you – please do not walk away. It won't be easy, but I believe that winning back the Labour Party is the only game in town.

Tony Woodley is General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union.

LABOUR

The devil you know?

The new politics born of devolution has seen a growth in the number of left of centre parties in Scotland. But do they provide a realistic alternative for FBU political activity, asks Elaine Smith

GIVEN the stance taken by the New Labour leadership during the industrial dispute of 2002, no-one, at least no-one on the Labour Left, can possibly fain surprise at news of the FBU's internal deliberations on the issue of Labour Party affiliation.

Whilst many would agree that the belligerent and, at times, downright disrespectful behaviour of some New Labour Ministers during this dispute certainly provided ample justification for such deliberations, would the same people really advocate that time has run out for the FBU/Labour alliance?

The obvious argument for maintaining the traditional Trade Union/Labour Party link of 'Better the devil you know ...' has been an all too familiar tactic employed by New Labour over the years; where trade unions and Party members have been threatened with the spectre of Thatcherism to ensure their acquiescence with otherwise unpalatable policies.

DEVOLUTION

In Scotland however, this argument has become increasingly tenuous. The new politics born of devolution has seen an undeniable growth in the number of left of centre parties, undoubtedly providing possible alternatives for the FBU.

Where the issue becomes less clear however, is on the matter of whether these parties actually provide a realistic alternative for FBU political activity? In Scotland, the parties such as the SSP and

SNP look set to remain on the periphery of politics for some time to come whilst in England the Socialist Alliance has no electoral presence.

George Galloway, who has more reasons than most to despise New Labour, would appear nevertheless, convinced of the centrality of the Labour Party to politics and political change in Britain:

"The Labour Party has millions of voters. It is known in every household in the land. It has hundreds of MPs, thousands of Councillors.

Even now – though we note the haemorrhaging in its ranks – it still has a couple of hundred thousand members. This is a behemoth compared to other Left groups, even the most successful of them" (*Weekly Worker* December 4 2003).

Indeed, there seems little point in arguing at this time for a new Party to represent the workers when we already have one, originally established in conjunction with the trade unions. Instead, I believe that trade unions working with grassroots Labour members can reclaim the Party back to more traditional labour values and policies.

UNION INFLUENCE

In Scotland we have been able to use trade union influence to make progress. A protocol has been introduced to address two-tier terms and conditions in PFI/PPP schemes; compulsory competitive tendering of public services has ceased;



CHRIS JAMES/SMG NEWSPAPERS LTD

Elaine Smith: The strike showed the relative ease of access that unions have to the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party

three-year funding settlements for Local Authorities have been introduced; funding has been provided for trade union learning and education projects; and a memorandum of understanding between the unions and the Scottish Executive has been implemented, guaranteeing that trade unions will be consulted on policy proposals.

Even the Fire Service strike, despite the tensions it caused, also served to show the relative ease of access that the unions have to the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party.

On several occasions, representatives of the FBU met with the Labour Trade Union Group and whilst some of these meetings were fractious, as you would expect, points were made and debated. Some, though admittedly not enough, Labour MSPs also joined firefighters on the picket lines.

SECTION 19 REPEAL

The strength of this relationship was also shown when the Executive was defeated trying to repeal Section 19 of the Fire Services Act in the form of an amendment to the Local Government Bill. Without the support of Labour backbenchers that piece of legislative change would have been enacted.

We all, trade unions included, have

MODERNISATION

to take some responsibility for the rise of New Labour.

Our naivety and nonchalance, or perhaps simple misguided optimism during the initial years of "the project", has left us undoubtedly complicit in the face of an increasingly right wing and neo-liberal agenda.

GROWING CAMPAIGN

There is no doubt that a return to more traditional Labour values is necessary and the trade unions are uniquely placed to put the Labour Party back on course.

In Scotland, Labour's Campaign for Socialism is growing in numbers and has formed an alliance with several key trade unions to change the way the Party operates in Scotland.

This can be strengthened by trade union members attending local branch and Constituency Labour Party meetings to help reinvigorate the Party at grass-roots level and to push for more radical programmes.

On the wider UK scene, "Save the Labour Party", which any member can join, is forming alliances to make the Party more democratic.

It is of course understandable that many trade unionists feel that maintaining the link with the Labour Party is becoming increasingly untenable. However, to sever the link with the Labour Party would be to concede defeat to the New Labour project and would consign the FBU to the political periphery.

Instead, I would urge the FBU and all trade unionists to use their power to help reinvigorate the Party at grassroots level and to work with others to reclaim the Labour Party to more traditional values.

After all, if the New Labour project can radically change the Labour Party in such a short space of time, then surely trade unions and grassroots members, the majority of the Labour Party, can claim it back.

Elaine Smith is MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston and Vice Convener of the Campaign for Socialism

Shaping the future



Members and Officials in the East Midlands have been working hard to ensure the FBU's vision of tomorrow's Fire & Rescue Service is implemented, says Dave Green

THE campaign to shape the Fire and Rescue Service in the 21st Century is still on. After the pay dispute, members and Officials in Brigades are facing the battles to maintain a modern, effective, high quality, public service to our communities.

What we certainly do not want is a downsized, cheap, understaffed Service with demotivated personnel matching basic standards set centrally by a Government which seems to quantify everything purely in pounds and pence!

What faces the Union is ensuring that it is our definition of "modernisation" that is implemented – not that of the Employers.

The major challenge for the FBU in Region 6 is to keep focussed on that aim against the myriad of attacks by CFOs and Fire Authorities. For their interpretation of the June agreement, White Paper and Draft Framework Document is a "carte blanche" to cut and delocalise the Service, while abdicating responsibility for its decision.

As a Region of five Brigades covering Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire,

Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire, Officials decided to take an honest and ordered appraisal of where we are as a Union post-June 13.

The Regional Committee has been the arena for frank discussions and debates during the Pay Dispute and this continues. But we also needed some closure on that part of the campaign (though there are still issues obviously outstanding) to be able to move forward to tackle the rest of the modernisation agenda.

To do this properly and in a constructive way, Region 6 used the expertise of Mick McGrath and Iain Reekie in a "Working Together" Regional School at Wortley Hall. Sessions produced useful and positive methods to use in Committees at every level which will further the aims of the Union and benefit all our members. The national seminars to debrief Officials in Nottingham and Glasgow continued the process.

Having found out where we are and where we are heading, we now need the route. While the National Pay Dispute Settlement has given the Service the

MODERNISATION

framework, locally we need to decide the details of the implementation.

Recognising the tactic managements use of 'best practice' – seeking the lowest common denominator and picking off individual examples to compare in negotiations – Region 6 held a "Negotiating Change" seminar facilitated by TUC tutor Trevor Cave. The list of subjects we need to cover is extensive, but the Audit Commission verification for the Pay Agreement and pressures from Brigades meant we prioritised Regional policies for overtime working and Wholetime/Retained and Retained/Wholetime duties.

At end of the two days, guidelines for negotiating policies in our five Brigades were drawn up. These were then formally agreed by Regional Committee. This will give support to Officials when dealing with Management. Discipline, grievance procedures, rank to role and IPDS have been identified as the next areas of analysis, along with further negotiating skills and education for officials at different levels.

The first year Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) have been written and accepted by Fire Authorities with minimal levels of consultation. Each Brigade Committee has submitted better thought-out and evidence-based analysis in response to the draft documents than that produced by CFOs and project officers on behalf of Fire Authorities in drafting the IRMPs.

Essentially none of the Brigades produced positive plans. They were all glossy sales brochures without proper risk assessment. None stated an objective of zero fire deaths, only one (Nottinghamshire) quantified attendance standards and that was only in order to get some resource to an incident in 10 minutes, meaning degradation for current 'A' and 'B' risks. Perhaps Irrational Reduction Management Proposals would be more accurate?

The Government's Regionalisation agenda moves on apace with the establishment of Regional Management Boards (RMBs) in April. We have written to the constituent Fire Authority Chairs requesting seats on the board which they ought to agree to if their statements of inclusiveness and partnership in shaping the future of the Fire and Rescue Service are genuine.

It is essential that the FBU is active on RMBs to direct them away from Regional Emergency Fire Control Rooms, with all their inherent dangers for the safety of the public and firefighters. Moreover the wider implications for Brigades must be highlighted. In the East Midlands the issue is very immediate with Leicestershire looking to take over the Control functions for Northants and possibly Lincs in the next few months. Officials are having to counter misinformation and ignorance from CFOs and Fire Authorities about the role of Controls.

While the National Pay Dispute Settlement has given the Service the framework, locally we need to decide the details of the implementation

All this is going on and yet we cannot forget issues surrounding fairness and equality and the health, safety and welfare of our members and Officials.

The changes in legislation and society have to be implemented in the Service and our Union for the benefit of all. If 'knowledge is power' and 'he who communicates is king' the FBU has to strive to ensure that information and views are efficiently and honestly passed both ways to best represent all members and the interests of the Fire and Rescue Service as a whole. Professionalism and integrity are necessities.

So, there are very busy, demanding times ahead for the foreseeable future. We as a Union have to face and deal with them in order to protect our families and communities. We also need to be aware of the stresses on our Officials – if we don't, no-one else will!

Dave Green is EC Member for Region 6

DIARY



Monday **19 April** – **GLASGOW**
Thursday **22 April**
STUC Conference 2004

Thursday **27 April** – **DERRY**
Friday **28 April**
ICTU Biennial Northern Ireland Conference

Friday **28 April** – **LLANDUDNO**
Sunday **30 April**
Wales TUC Annual Conference

Tuesday **11 May** – **BRIDLINGTON**
Friday **14 May**
FBU Annual Conference

Thursday **27 May** – **TENBY**
Friday **28 May**
Walesfire Conference

Monday **13 September** – **BRIGHTON**
Thursday **16 September**
TUC Conference 2004

Sunday **26 September** – **BRIGHTON**
Thursday **30 September**
Labour Party Conference

Friday, **8 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**
Sunday **10 October**
FBU Black and Ethnic Minority Members School

Friday **15 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**
Sunday **17 October**
FBU Gay and Lesbian School

Saturday **30 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**
Friday **5 November**
FBU National School

GLOBALISATION

Taxing the money trade to end poverty

Global solutions are required to take care of global problems. David Hillman reports on the expanding Tobin Tax Network in the UK

POPULAR campaigns often simmer beneath the surface for a while then erupt into public view and make political progress. Witness the campaign to free Nelson Mandela and liberate South Africa, the banning of landmines and the cancellation of poor country debt.

So in 2004, enter a new idea, stage left. One that in the space of 18 months has solicited the support of more than 50 charities, campaign agencies, faith groups and trade unions whose combined memberships amount to many millions of

UK citizens.

Founded by charity, War on Want, the well-known names include: Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children and Greenpeace; faith groups from the National Council of Hindu Temples to the United Reformed Church; and trade unions such as UNISON, the GMB and of course, the FBU. The grand idea that so many agencies have signed up to, is a uniquely important initiative in the war against poverty. It is called the Tobin Tax and it has extraordinary potential.

Named after the Nobel-prize winning economist, James Tobin, the Tobin Tax is a tiny levy on the staggeringly large money trade. The market that trades money, unsurprisingly, is the richest market in the world. Astonishing however, is that this market is over 50 times larger in value than all the world's other markets combined. The lucrative buying and selling of Dollars, Euros and Sterling, turns over the almost unimaginable amount of 200,000 billion pounds each year. This is equivalent to a pile of £50 notes stretching from the surface of the earth to the surface of the moon.

At its simplest the Tobin Tax, operating at a rate of hundredths of 1%, would tax this enormous pile of money, raising massive revenues to provide clean water, medication and schooling to people in the poorest countries.

Yet the Tobin Tax is required for another important reason. Aggressive buying and selling of currencies often causes widespread poverty to occur in the first place. Currency speculation is now widely recognised as a major contributory factor to the financial crises that in recent years have struck Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Brazil and Argentina, where millions of people lost their jobs and were driven into poverty.

But how can the Tobin Tax stop this

kind of brutish behaviour by financial heavyweights if it is a very low tax to raise revenue for international development projects? The solution is simple and brilliant.

Today's Tobin Tax is a variable tax. It can be altered to deal with different circumstances. Most of the time it is very low – hundredths of 1% – but at times of extreme volatility, when a currency is being attacked by speculators, the Government or the Central Bank, has the power to raise the Tax so significantly that it makes trading in the currency unprofitable. In this way it can both raise revenue and stabilise the financial system at one and the same time. Brilliant!

WILL IT WORK?

BUT is the Tobin Tax feasible, is it technically possible to implement? Well, in fact, the market is electronic, so taxing it is simple. Taxing the currency deals at the point at which they are settled is now widely accepted to be easy to do, cheap and difficult to evade.

The United Nations signed up to the Millennium Development Goals to halve world poverty by the year 2015. In order to pay for this, it is necessary to come up with innovative new income streams. It is estimated the Tobin Tax will generate revenues of tens of billions of dollars.

The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is widely known to be committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and is on record as saying he is "open-minded" to the Tobin Tax. France has already gone much further and passed legislation for a Tobin Tax and Belgium is about to do the same. Germany is positive; Brazil, India and Canada are positive – there is a growing momentum to bring this idea into reality.

The growth of the Tobin Tax Network in the UK reflects this remarkable momentum. The Tobin Tax is a huge idea whose time has come. In this era of globalisation, global solutions are required to take care of global problems.

David Hillman is Tobin Tax Network co-ordinator



The money trade is worth two hundred thousand billion pounds a year

A tiny tax on the market in currencies can bring millions of people out of poverty

Support the Tobin Tax

Sign the nationwide petition now at...

www.tobintax.org.uk
37-39 Great Guildford Street
London, SE1 0ES

Tobin Tax Network

ASYLUM

Asylum rights are human rights

The draconian measures in the latest Asylum Bill attack the fundamental human rights of people fleeing persecution and will add to racism, says Denis Fernando, co-ordinator for the NAAR.

PARLIAMENT is currently considering the fifth piece of legislation in a decade on asylum and immigration.

The proposals in the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Bill continue the trend of earlier legislation, eroding asylum rights and undermining our commitment to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees.

Despite claiming to reform the asylum system, successive pieces of legislation have increased chaos, whilst simultaneously inflicting misery upon asylum seekers.

Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 is an example of this. This measure on its own has left thousands of asylum seekers on the streets without State support for food or shelter.

It applies to asylum seekers who have not claimed asylum at a port of entry



Protest outside the Home Office

or cannot provide proof of when they entered Britain. Despite a couple of successful challenges in the High Court, the Government succeeded in winning a case in the Court of Appeal, enabling them to continue this inhumane policy.

The new Bill proposes further draconian measures.

These include putting decisions by the Home Secretary and the proposed new single tier tribunal above the rule of law,

removing the right to appeal to higher courts to overturn decisions by the Home Secretary or the new tribunal.

The opposition in the Commons and Lords on this issue has forced the Lord Chancellor to climb down on this issue, and the government is currently considering a new proposal which it will reveal to the House of Lords in early April.

The importance of the rule of law cannot be understated: The Home Office made the wrong initial decision in nearly 14,000 asylum cases in 2002; with around one in five refusals being overturned after costly appeals.

A recent study by Amnesty International revealed that Home Office asylum decisions were based on inaccu-

The new Bill takes away the judicial scrutiny essential to overturning the Home Office's failures. Those facing decisions on asylum and immigration will be stripped of the right of equal access to justice

ASYLUM

rate and out-of-date country information, unreasoned decisions about people's credibility and a failure to properly consider complex torture cases.

The new Bill takes away the judicial scrutiny essential to overturning the Home Office's failures. Those facing decisions on asylum and immigration will be stripped of the right of equal access to justice.

Other draconian measures in the Bill include imprisonment for up to two years if asylum seekers arrive without travel documentation, failing to recognise that many asylum seekers travel without documents because they are fleeing persecution.

Electronic tagging is proposed as an alternative to detention on failed applicants awaiting deportation, which will also criminalise asylum seekers.

State support for families whose applications for asylum have failed will be stopped, effectively throwing them into destitution in order to coerce families to agree to deportation.

This extends the terrible impact of Section 55 to families. The Government has powers to take away the children of those who are made destitute, putting them into care. Concerns have been raised by charities that this measure will undermine fundamental elements of the Human Rights Act.

BROAD OPPOSITION

THE Bill has been met with criticism from three Cross-party Parliamentary Committees including the Home Affairs Committee which concluded that the majority of applicants in Britain are fleeing persecution and there must be improvement in the system of initial decisions.

At the Report stage of the Bill, significant rebellions occurred on this issue, including a cross section of Labour MPs.

"Lord Chief Justice Woolf's comments criticising the single tier tribunal vocalised the opposition in the House of Lords."

The Bill is also opposed by a wide cross-section of society. The Coalition Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill is supported by over 170 organisations including The Scottish TUC, Amnesty International UK, Asylum

Legal aid support for asylum and immigration cases has been reduced to five hours for initial applications, even though cases of those facing persecution can take up to 50 hours.

Rights Campaign, The Children's Society, Conference of Religious in England and Wales, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Liberty, Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and the Terrence Higgins Trust.

It is essential that the trade union movement plays its role in the campaign opposing these measures, taking part in lobbying MPs and Lords around amendments to reduce the negative measures in the Bill.

On top of these measures, The Lord Chancellor's office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs has reduced legal aid support for asylum and immigration cases to five hours for initial applications, even though cases of those facing persecution can take up to 50 hours.

This threshold can only be challenged if a case is deemed to have 'a good chance of success'. The reality is, only adequate legal aid can assure a successful application.

This proposal will take away the right to full access to justice for those most in need of our support, making their applications more likely to fail.

Attacking asylum rights has been a trend of Governments across Europe. It has created a climate in which hostilities against asylum seekers and racism generally have increased.

The net result has been the legitimisation and growth of the extreme Right. Austria, Italy, Switzerland and France have seen fascists elected to Government

positions, against a backdrop of policy which scapegoats asylum seekers and immigrants, as well as attacking the settled ethnic minority communities.

The law banning the hijab in France is an attempt to appease the electorate of Le Pen's Front National, who took six million votes in the second round of the 2002 Presidential elections.

In Britain we have a chance to learn from these mistakes. We should be wary of the survey published in January, which placed race and immigration third on the list of peoples' concerns, after education and health.

The same survey showed that four in ten white people do not want to live next door to black people.

On the other hand, successive opinion polls in London have shown that an overwhelming majority of people value London's diversity as one of the main reasons for living in the Capital. What this shows is that there is an alternative and that is to promote a multicultural, diverse society, not attack it.

STOP RACISM

THIS is essential to stopping the rise of racism and the far Right. A positive approach on asylum is necessary, just like the one the Government is seeking to develop on the issue of migrant workers.

The Government's approach must help turn opinion around on asylum. David Blunkett himself has praised migrant workers who make a "disproportionate" contribution to the economy, paying £2.5bn more in tax each year than they take out in services.

The fact of the matter is that total Government spending on all aspects of immigration and asylum is less than 0.5% of total Government spending. This exposes the virulent anti-asylum agenda put forward by the reactionary press, which is unfortunately directing our current policy.

For more information on the Coalition Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill and to sign its statement of support please contact National Assembly Against Racism on www.naar.org.uk, info@naar.org.uk or 020 7247 9907

INTERNATIONAL

ACTION PLANNED ACROSS EUROPE

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has called for a European day of action this month in order to push for more social rights in the EU. It is the first time the ETUC has called for co-ordinated action in each member state since 1992.

The dates chosen, 2 and 3 April, come shortly before the enlargement of the EU in May, when 10 new countries will join, and the elections to the European Parliament in June.

The intention is that each national confederation affiliated to the ETUC (in Britain it is the TUC) should organise its own national event. And with the dates chosen falling on Friday and Saturday they can choose whether to call the action during a working day or at the weekend.

ETUC General Secretary John Monks said it was important to "send the signal that we need a Europe with a strong social dimension and not a drift towards the American model."

In January, the ETUC set the Irish six-month Presidency "ten social tests":

1. Ensure a democratic, modern and social Constitutional Treaty for Europe;
2. Launch measures to address the immediate problems facing Europe and pursue the commitment to 'More and Better Jobs' based on economic, employment and social cohesion policies;
3. Develop a common EU migration and asylum policy tackling integration and the

management of migratory flows;

4. End the three-year delay in the legislative review of European Works Councils;
5. Implement the Community strategy for health and safety at work, 2002-2006;
6. Integrate employment considerations and participation with regards to company merger supervision;
7. Adopt the directive on temporary agency work;
8. End the individual 'opt-out' on working time and restrict other derogations;
9. Initiate procedures for a framework directive on services of general interest or impose a legislative moratorium concerning liberalisation;
10. Develop the corporate social responsibility (CSR) debate in the framework of the European Social Model and make it clear that CSR is not an alternative to social dialogue and collective bargaining.

www.lrd.org.uk
www.etuc.org

HAITIAN UNION LEADERS RELEASED

The release from prison in Port-au-Prince on 29 February of ten trade union activists held for over one month was warmly applauded today by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The freeing of the prisoners (nine men, detained at the National Penitentiary and one woman, held in the women's prison, Fort National) came in the wake of the abrupt departure of Haiti's former President

Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The detainees had been arrested during an illegal raid by Haiti's Police Nationale on the headquarters of the umbrella trade union group "Coordination Syndicale Haïtienne" (CSH) on 24 January 2004. They had been charged with "criminal conspiracy" and "plotting against the internal security of the State"; a charge carrying a sentence of imprisonment with forced labour for life.

An international trade union delegation, led by the ICFTU and its Regional Inter-American Organisation (ICFTU-ORIT), had forcefully rejected these charges after visiting the prisoners in jail in Port-au-Prince and meeting with their lawyers, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Haiti representative.

While welcoming the release of the 10 union detainees, the ICFTU is still preoccupied with their safety, a concern already put forward by the mission which had visited the island from 15 to 18 February. Several Haitian labour leaders and activists still remain in hiding, while others went underground last night, fearing reprisals from Aristide's ill-famed "Chimères" and other criminal elements.

SRI LANKA VIOLATES LABOUR RIGHTS

In a new report on core labour standards in Sri Lanka, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), has warned that despite the government's official claim that it respects core labour standards, serious violations

of those fundamental rights continue and are still widespread.

When Sri Lanka applied to the European Union for additional trade preferences in 2003, the country's government told the EU that it respected all of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) eight conventions; often referred to as "core labour standards". It was on these grounds that the EU agreed this year to give Sri Lanka the tariff cuts that the country had requested.

The report notes that workers' rights are often violated, especially in free trade zones where organising is suppressed by management and by the Board of Investment.

Workers have the right to collective bargaining, but in practice companies attempt to avoid collective bargaining and union recognition at their workplaces. There is no adequate protection against anti-union discrimination and many complaints remain ignored and unanswered.

Child labour is prevalent in Sri Lanka. Most children work in the informal economy, mainly in agriculture (63.3%), manufacturing (14.8%) and hotels (10.8%) but also in construction and industrial crop production. There are also disturbing reports of child prostitution, in particular, in certain coastal resorts.

Furthermore, the report draws attention to the trafficking of women and children for forced labour and sexual exploitation.

www.global-unions.org

LETTERS

Just think what it would be like without the FBU

Dear Firefighter

On 26 November 2002, I had a discussion with a Retained Sub Officer from a neighbouring fire station. He was from the RFU. The content of the debate was the morality of a strike in the public services.

Following our discussion, the RFU member contacted his Brigade Rep and was told to report the discussion to the North Wales Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Simon Smith. It was seen as a good opportunity to discredit the FBU and in doing so may have given the RFU some high profile publicity.

On 3 December 2002, I was cautioned and charged with an alleged crime

against Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

On 18 December 2002 the Brigade wrote to me to inform me that the Crown Prosecution Service was taking no further action. However, the letter said I would be subject to a formal investigation under the Discipline Regulations for Bullying and Harassment.

The procedure was dragged out for 15 months climaxing at a Full Hearing on 13 February 2004.

Despite my Accused Friend Mike Smith, EC member for Wales, proving beyond doubt that two of three prosecution witnesses were lying and the case should have been thrown out on a

Point of Order, the CFO found me guilty and awarded me a caution.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the FBU for supporting me throughout my ordeal with CFO Smith—and give special thanks to John Purser and Mike Smith (no relation to Simon Smith!).

I have no doubt that only for the skills of Bro Smith, the CFO would have given me a far more serious award. Any award higher than reprimand would have the right to appeal to the Fire Authority where CFO Smith would undoubtedly have been overturned.

I know some of the members are smarting and may be disillusioned with the Union following the last dispute but just think what it would be like without the FBU. The likes of my CFO and his cronies would have free rein.

**W.G. Jones, ADO
Flintshire**

Open letter to John Prescott

Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

The people of Shropshire and Wrekin have been treated abysmally by politicians, from local to national.

The establishment has failed in its duty to monitor and protect local democracy: the Combined Fire Authority of Shropshire and Wrekin (CFA), the Standards Boards for England, Audit Commission, Local Authority Ombudsman and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Your Office and the above public bodies have been supplied with sufficient documented evidence, which should have caused at the very least an investigation into the proposal to reduce the CFA's fire cover by five fire engines.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate was insufficiently concerned and it is

suspected that concern was registered.

For over two years the ODPM has evaded making any decision. The normal application to reduce fire engines has produced a result in the past, within six to eight weeks.

It can only be assumed that it was determined a decision would not be made due to the high probability that a change in legislation would relieve you of your responsibility.

The CFA is now about to reduce the fire cover as proposed. This decision has been made even though, over a four year period, serious objections and evidence in opposition to the proposal have been presented to the public.

The people are, at the very least entitled to know the views of the Secretary of State and his professional advisors given the amount of time and

effort both sides have contributed over more than two years of deliberations.

During this saga there have been serious allegations and evidence submitted to your Office with queries unanswered. The people of Shropshire and Wrekin were sufficiently concerned and expected someone to cause an investigation.

The public would appreciate your observations even though a decision is not legally required.

In the future a person may wish to question the CFA's wisdom in reducing the fire cover, if an unfortunate loss of life or property occurred. It would be very important to know the view of your Office, especially the professional advisors. (HMIFS)

**Stan Wyness, OOT Member
Address supplied**

 The Firefighter welcomes letters from readers.

Please send them to: FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk, including your name, address, branch/region and a contact telephone number.



NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

MISSION STATEMENT

The National Women's Committee of the Fire Brigades Union is an elected group of women members, seeking to:

- ★ Identify, resolve and promote all issues affecting women in the Fire Service
- ★ Progress equality and diversity issues in the workplace
- ★ Actively promote and support the FBU's policy of eradicating bullying and harassment in the workplace
- ★ Create and promote a supportive network for women FBU members
- ★ Provide and promote education opportunities for women in the FBU
- ★ Encourage women's participation in mainstream FBU issues
- ★ Through effective involvement in the Trade Union Movement, equalise opportunities and improve conditions for all women workers
- ★ Assist and advise other organisations with common goals and aims
- ★ Advance and pursue international issues

Contact us
www.fbu.org.uk
office@fbu.org.uk

Vicky Knight *EC member for women*
Kerry Baigent *National Women's Secretary*
Dona Feltham *National Women's Chair*