



Volume 32 No. 5 June 2004

FIRE FIGHTER

Pensions
battle
continues



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

RETAINED

WHOLE TIME

EDITORIAL

Zero fire deaths – not only desirable, but achievable



At the end of May, the Union launched its national IRMP strategy, at the Wales Fire Conference in Tenby.

This strategy is explained in detail in the National IRMP Document, which is being sent as a guide to all 58 UK Fire Authorities and which delegates to Annual Conference should all have in their possession.

The Document reiterates our fears of a postcode lottery Fire and Rescue Service now that the Government has abolished the national safety net – The National Standards of Fire Cover

It expresses our concerns that new locally set Fire Cover plans are being rushed through without first being trialled and tested or based on any real evidence that they really work.

And it also expresses our anger at the Governments scaling back of targets to reduce fire deaths.

What we propose – and is central to our strategy – is a target of zero fire deaths.

I stress a UK wide target of zero fire deaths is not simply desirable, it is achievable, as long as the Fire and Rescue Service is given adequate resources to properly fund both prevention and intervention work.

That is the only way we can do our best to ensure, under the new Integrated Risk Management System, the safety of the public and the Firefighters – FBU members – who risk their lives every day protecting our communities.

We all know the dangers of serving on the frontline in the Fire and Rescue Service.

Most of us have friends or colleagues who have suffered injuries – some have seen greater tragedies.

Last month our colleague Richard Jenkins, a Firefighter, just 28 years old, was killed on duty in Wales. He left a wife and two children.

On behalf of the Union I would like to

pay homage to his bravery and express my condolences to his family.

National Officer John McGhee and I recently joined other TUC affiliates, including the so-called “big four” Unions, at a meeting that called for a radical third term Labour Government.

This unprecedented show of unity and purpose in the labour movement builds on the advances of the TUC and Labour Party Conferences. The discussions focused on those key manifesto demands the trade unions would promote collectively.

The FBU made its contribution, putting our arguments, along with others, for a new agenda centred on the needs of all working people and working class communities – stronger public services, improved employment rights and greater security in retirement.

Andy Gilchrist

A stylized blue ink signature of Andy Gilchrist.



FIREFIGHTER

Volume 32 No. 5 June 2004

Published by The Fire Brigades Union
Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road,
Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE

Design: periodicals@edition.co.uk

Print: Folium Print, Kingsbury Business Park,
Kingsbury-Road, Minworth, Birmingham B76 9DL

NEWS IN BRIEF

POSTAL WORKERS
AND BNP

Postal workers in Somerset and Wales are refusing to deliver election leaflets for the British National Party (BNP) alleging they are racist.

The workers are using a conscience clause in their contract for the first time to allow them to refuse to carry election literature for the far right.

Kevin Beazer of the CWU Communication Workers' Union said: "We've got a national agreement between the union and the employer as regards the conscience clause. "This means our postmen and women don't have to deliver offensive material and we find the BNP to be a fascist and racist party and therefore we don't have to deliver this material."

In Wales, CWU South East Wales Branch Secretary Charlie Balch said it was down to individual members. "There is a duty to deliver these leaflets but clearly a lot of our members have problems with them," he stated. "People have consciences and they are refusing to deliver this sort of stuff to homes our service has to go to day in day out, 52 weeks a year.

"There is an ethnic mix to some of the areas we have to deliver to and we represent many people from ethnic backgrounds. In a lot of our offices we will get a large amount of people refusing to carry anything to do with the BNP.

"This has caused a lot of upset and people are within their rights to use the conscience clause. It's never happened before here. We are not telling them to refuse, it's down to them."

Balch said "a lot" of CWU's 2,000 members in the South East Wales CF postcode area had refused to deliver the leaflet, with a large proportion in the

Cardiff delivery office taking that view.

A Royal Mail spokesperson said: "We have a legal obligation under the Representation of the People Act to deliver election material for all legitimate political parties standing in the forthcoming elections.

We have, however, agreed with the CWU that where employees have genuine concerns in delivering political material we will be sympathetic and seek to make alternative arrangements."

www.lrd.org.uk

STUC AND
BNP

The Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC) has expressed its concerns at the rise in the politics of racism and fascism in Scotland. The STUC pledged to support workers who are required as part of their job to distribute any materials from the avowedly racist BNP.

STUC General Secretary Bill Speirs said: "It is understandable that postal workers, journalists and television production staff are concerned that they may be asked to distribute election literature, interview candidates, or air party election broadcasts from a party that openly rejects diversity and multiculturalism, promotes hatred and misinformation, and divides communities.

"There is a fine line between freedom of speech and how we deal with people whose statements, leaflets and broadcasts actually infringe on the rights of others. The STUC is encouraging anyone who is offended by a party election broadcast or literature that they receive through their letter box to report this to the police."

www.lrd.org.uk

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Cover illustration Brian Gallagher



FBU CONFIDENTIAL STRESS AND SUPPORT LINE

0 8 0 0 7 8 3 4 7 7 8

DON'T BE BULLIED, DON'T GET STRESSED, GET HELP FROM THE FBU FREE SERVICE

NEWS IN BRIEF

UNIONS UNITE FOR RADICAL THIRD TERM

Labour-affiliated Unions met last month to express their commitment to campaigning for a third term for the Labour Government.

The Unions present agreed this was in the best interests of British workers and the wider general public.

At the meeting the Unions emphasised that a third term can be achieved with a clear, unambiguous, radical manifesto which deals with the issues most important to the public.

The manifesto needs to re-energise Labour activists with vote-winning policies on public services, pensions, manufacturing and fairness at work.

"We all believe a radical third term Labour Government is in the best interests of British workers and the wider general public," said UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis.

"There are divisions in the Labour Party and the country, particularly over our foolhardy involvement in Iraq and the use of privatisation in our public services, which have to be healed.

"We agreed we wanted to work to get radical policies on public services, pensions, manufacturing and fairness at work to bring greater security for people at work and in retirement."

The Unions met at a seminar organised by Catalyst. The Unions present accounted for more than 80 per cent of Labour-affiliated membership.

They were: AMICUS, ASLEF,

CWU, FBU, GMB, GPMU, NUM, TGWU and UNISON.

PENSIONS 'VICTORY FOR UNION CAMPAIGNING'

The Government has caved in to demands for compensation to safeguard the pensions of an estimated 60,000 workers by committing £400m of public funds to a long-term rescue package.

Following intense pressure from Unions, Labour backbenchers and opposition leaders, ministers agreed to set up the fund to ensure that workers who have lost their pensions because their employer went bust would receive compensation.

The deal, thrashed out at meetings between Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and the Pensions Secretary, Andrew Smith, means the Government warded off a massive Commons rebellion – and potential defeat – over the pensions bill.

More than 200 MPs put their names to a motion calling for protection to be retrospective, and were threatening to inflict a crushing blow on Mr Blair at a time when he can ill afford it.

Announcing the deal, Mr Smith said he hoped the move would provide a boost to workers who were facing cuts in their retirement income of up to 90%. "This will give real help to people who have lost their life savings through no fault of their own," he said.

Critics warned the compensation fund would prove inadequate.

Ministers initially rejected pleas for compensation,

having argued that protecting private occupational pensions was not their concern.

However a campaign in recent months has snowballed with hundreds of MPs signing parliamentary motions calling for compensation. A succession of hardship cases also made ministers appear callous.

The TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, said the deal was an important victory for Union campaigning: "Ministers who have been working hard for a just deal deserve praise. The task now is to make sure that each individual who has lost out gets a fair deal from the funds announced today."

"Yet this is not the only pensions issue. The retreat from good salary-related pensions continues, fewer people have any access to a pension at work and the state pension is not keeping up with earnings."

Barber added that the "victory will spur Unions to step up our campaign for a new pensions settlement."

The TUC is holding a pay up for pensions march and rally on June 19 in London.

■ Details are available at www.tuc.org.uk/pensionsrally

TUC PRAISES GOVERNMENT JOBS RECORD

The TUC has praised the Government record in tackling mass unemployment, particularly among young people.

In 1994 the TUC called on politicians to make full employment their goal. It was derided for setting an

unattainable target, and many still thought it unreasonable in 1997.

In 1997 unemployment (ILO definition) was still at 2m and the claimant count at 1.6m. Seven years later the UK has the highest employment rate in the G7 group of leading industrialised countries, and its unemployment rate is the lowest. Unemployment has fallen by three-quarters of a million, and is at its lowest level for 30 years.

Jobcentre Plus, created in 2001, has faced difficulties, but overall has been a success. By 2006 the public employment service and the administration of benefits for most people of working age will have been completely merged – a model currently being investigated by policy analysts from all over the world. The rate of increase in claims for Incapacity Benefit has been stabilised, and substantial sums are being invested in helping disabled people to move into employment.

Welfare-to-work policies and substantial benefit and tax credit increases have helped the Government to achieve its 2004 target of reducing child poverty by a quarter.

Employment rates for hard to help groups have, for the most part, risen even faster than the increase for people generally.

www.tuc.org.uk
www.guardian.co.uk

HEALTH & SAFETY

UNIONS MOURN BLAST VICTIMS AND CALL FOR ANSWERS

Nine workers are known to have been killed and 40 injured, many seriously, in a devastating 11 May plastics factory blast in Glasgow. Early indications are that an industrial oven exploded at Stockline Plastics in the Maryhill area of the city.

There has been speculation about possible safety problems at the plant – it is known that the company was served a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) improvement notice in February 2000 for failing to maintain adequate risk assessments on hazardous substances.

Scotland's top Union body STUC has written to the Health and Safety Executive seeking clarification on health and safety enforcement activity at the factory.

Ian Tasker, STUC health and safety officer, said: 'This is the worst industrial accident in the past 25 years and the STUC considers it a duty, both to the workers in this factory and throughout Scotland, to work to ensure that health and safety procedures and enforcement minimise risks at all times.'

He added that STUC's first thoughts were for the bereaved, the injured and all those affected by the tragedy.

Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell has promised a full and thorough inquiry into the blast. An HSE investigation is under way.

HOMEWORKERS 'EXPLOITED' BY FIRMS

The UK Government must implement international labour standards if the exploitation of Britain's one million homeworkers is to be halted.

Made at home, a report from TUC, Oxfam and the National Group on Homeworking (NGH), says homeworkers frequently work for pennies with few employment rights, forced overtime and no health and safety checks.

The groups are calling on the Government to extend all employment rights to homeworkers and agency and casual workers under the current Employment Status Review.

They would also like to see the Government implement the International Convention on Homework, the international labour standard set down by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The three organisations are also calling on retailers to ensure that workers' rights are upheld throughout their supply chains – in the UK as well as internationally.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'The situation is made worse because the law covering homeworkers is unclear. If they complain, it's likely that their supply of work will stop without notice, so many homeworkers stay silent and abuses go unreported. Homeworkers should get the same employment rights as all other employees – their status as third class workers

cannot be allowed to continue.'

LONG HOURS UNHEALTHY FOR DRIVERS

Retail Union USDAAW is warning transport companies not to 'bury their heads in the sand' as the introduction of new regulations on maximum working hours draw closer.

USDAAW research has revealed that the excessive hours culture in the road transport industry is damaging the health, family and social lives of UK drivers.

The findings, based on survey responses from 750 drivers, suggest one in four drivers work in excess of 60 hours a week. Over 70 per cent said working long hours had damaged their family and social lives, while six in 10 said it had damaged their health.

Regulations come into force in March 2005 which will set a 48-hour maximum working week for drivers.

USDAAW General Secretary Bill Connor said: 'USDAAW accepts that change will be difficult for many of the firms in which we have members, but we have already negotiated deals, well in advance of the introduction of the directive, that prove change can be managed effectively. The onus rests with the employer not to leave this to the last minute.' Agreements with ACC Transport (*Risks 134*) and AF Blakemore & Son Ltd (*Risks 141*) have resulted in reduced working hours with no loss of pay for around 1,300 drivers.

IGNORANT BOSSES PLACE PREGNANT WORKERS AT RISK

More than two-thirds of pregnant workers are exposed to danger in the workplace because employers ignore a legal duty to carry out risk assessments, an USDAAW survey has revealed.

The retail Union says fewer than three in ten pregnant women are given a risk assessment at work, which is a legal requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

The statistic is revealed in the initial findings of an USDAAW survey of its members, designed to determine the problems faced in the workplace by pregnant women.

Many managers were dangerously ignorant, the study found. Pregnant women working in supermarkets described being put on 'light duties' by working on checkouts – a job that, on average, is likely to result in the employee lifting goods weighing in excess of one ton during the course of a four-hour shift.

Bill Connor, USDAAW General Secretary, said: 'Risk assessments are not voluntary, they are required under legally-binding employment regulations. Companies need to scrutinise their health and safety procedures – because too many managers clearly have no idea what they have to do to ensure women are not put at any risk during pregnancy. The current trend cannot continue.'

EQUALITY

SEX EQUALITY LAW HAILED

The Government's pledge to give public sector bodies a duty to promote equality for women and men will be the most significant change in sex equality law in the 30 years since the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) came into force, **says** the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

The White Paper, published 12 May, sets out the Government's plans to establish a Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR), including this important change in sex equality law.

"Thirty years' experience of sex equality law has taught us that individual rights stick with individual women and men. That's why many of the wider changes that people hoped for 30 years ago have been slow to come about. It's time to lift the burden from individuals' shoulders and put the responsibility on public organisations to change," says the EOC.

"The new duty will help organisations make public policy and services more responsive to women's and men's needs. Modernised services and improved employment practices will give women and men more choices about their roles at home and at work. This should also lead to a closing of the gap between women and men's pay as employers will be able to make full use of the skills available to them, and the economy will get a boost too."

Below are the sort of issues that the EOC expects public

policy to address as a result of the new law on sex equality:

- removing barriers to women entering training in areas like plumbing, construction and engineering – which will help close the pay gap and solve skill shortages; removing barriers to men entering training in areas such as childcare;
- providing adequate childcare to prevent women having to take low paid part-time work and men working longer hours – the longest hours in Europe – to compensate; 73% of parents currently report a lack of affordable childcare in their area;
- providing family services that reflect the increasing amount of time men spend on childcare;
- providing transport services that recognise that women are less likely to drive and may take different journeys to men;
- creating health services that encourage more men to consult their GPs sooner, helping to reduce serious illness.

CARERS HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH

The Government's commitment to introducing flexible working for carers, confirmed by the Prime Minister on 22 April, marks a historic breakthrough in progress towards a society in which families matter, according to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

Julie Mellor, Chair of the EOC, said: "This will be a massively popular policy. A

recent EOC survey found overwhelming support for the extension of flexible working to more people. By making this commitment the Government has proved that it really does listen to what people say would make a difference to their quality of life.

"Nearly one in five carers has had to give up or turn down a job opportunity because of their caring responsibilities. Giving them the right to request flexible working recognises that they face many similar challenges to those faced by working parents. It will give those who want to work a far greater chance of being able to do so, boosting their quality of life and also enabling them to contribute to the success of the British economy.

"The reality is that with an ageing population most of us will at some point have to balance caring for children, or for ill, older or disabled relatives with our job. A quarter of carers – the 'sandwich generation' – have dependent children too.

"The DTI's research shows that nine in ten companies have had no significant problems with the new right to request flexible working for parents of young children and 68% believed that the opportunity to work flexibly has had a positive effect on employee attitudes and morale. The time is ripe for more employers and employees to enjoy the benefits that flexible working can bring."

www.eoc.org.uk

BLACK WORKERS AND JOBS

Racism is still blighting the lives of Britain's black workers, despite the success of Government employment schemes like the New Deal, which have not benefited black workers as much as their white counterparts. The TUC is calling on the Government to introduce extra measures to reverse this trend, including legally requiring all employers in the private and voluntary sectors to promote good race relations in their organisations. Such a legal requirement already exists for public sector employers.

In a new report, *Moving on ... How Britain's Unions are tackling racism*, the TUC reveals that despite sustained, record low unemployment among the white population at 4.4%, among black and Asian people unemployment is two and half times greater at 11.3%. This position is worse than in 1990 and confirms the trend reported by the Government's General Household Survey that unemployment rates have got worse for second generation British born descendents of immigrants.

The report argues that it is essential for the New Deal projects to benefit black and Asian workers as much as white workers. At present the New Deal for young people provides 10% fewer sustained jobs for black and Asian people than for white people.

The report also shows how five Unions – including BECTU, UNISON and USDAW – are coming up with solutions to black workers' problems.

www.tuc.org.uk

RETAINED PENSIONS

The FBU is prepared to take a legal test case to secure equal pension and sick pay rights for retained firefighters all the way



Union in court fight for retained pensions justice

A LEGAL test case is being fought by the Fire Brigades Union to secure equal pension and sick pay rights for retained firefighters. The fight was taken to the Court of Appeal in London over three days at the end of March and beginning of April after the Union lost at the initial stages.

The case centres on the exclusion of retained firefighters from the pension scheme and worse treatment under the sick pay scheme. The Union's case is that retained firefighters do the same work and discriminating between retained and wholetime is unlawful under the part-time workers regulations.

The employers' legal case rests on pointing to minute differences in the contracts between retained and wholetime firefighters. Their legal case is that wholetime firefighters and retained firefighters are not engaged in the same or broadly similar work and so are not

covered by new Government regulations which prohibit discrimination against part-time workers.

The employer's legal case is founded on what amounts to little more than a "spot the difference" argument about the work and contracts of retained and wholetime

'The employers claim they want a modern Fire Service yet they practise old fashioned discrimination. The Fire Service will not be modern until we are all treated in the same way and entitled to the same rights.'

crews. The Union's legal team argued there was no real difference. The employer's legal team at one stage suggested that retained firefighters did little more than attend incidents until wholetimes arrived.

"I almost fell off my seat when I heard that" said Morris Butterfield who represents retained firefighters on the Union's National Executive. "In the Highland and Islands – where I am from – there are only three wholetime stations to cover an area the size of Belgium, the rest are retained. It's similar in some other parts of the UK: the first and only firefighters at the scene are retained firefighters, they really were astonishing comments to make."

The test case, backed by the Fire Brigades Union, is being taken by 12 retained firefighters, six from Kent and six from Berkshire. These 12 "lead" cases have been whittled down from 12,000 cases

RETAINED PENSIONS

‘Retained members are fed up with being looked on by management as a Fire Service on the cheap. A firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter. Hopefully this case will go some way to rectify that.’

started by FBU members in employment tribunals in 2001.

Although retained members would have strong views about even being thought of as part-time, those are the only laws which can be used to make the legal challenge. But no matter what the decision of the Court of Appeal, there are likely to be appeals and cross-appeals to the House of Lords and possibly the European Court of Justice. The Union has set aside significant sums of money to fight the case to its conclusion.

Colin Elliot, a retained firefighter from Wokingham in Berkshire and one of the firefighters named in the test case said: “I’ve been a retained firefighter for 22 years and we deal with any incident. We attended the fire which nearly destroyed Windsor Castle, and that was major news. In 1990 we spent all day recovering bodies and putting out fires when there was the M4 motorway pile up that claimed 13 lives.

“We live and work in the communities we serve and operationally we do the same work. Retained firefighters feel very strongly about this issue. I have seen colleagues leave the Service after 25 and more years without a pension and that is unjust.

“At the original tribunal I heard the employers arguing about some small differences and some of those were wrong. They really were scraping the bottom of the barrel in some of the claims they were making. Their claims about differences

between wholetime and retained simply do not stand up.”

The Union is represented by leading employment and pension lawyers Thompsons solicitors, Brian Langstaffe QC and barrister Martin Seaward. Richard Arthur of Thompsons said: “This is the first major test case on the part-time workers regulations. It will hinge on whether retained firefighters and wholetime do the same job, as the Union has successfully argued in other cases.

“The decision will impact on all part-time workers in the UK, not only retained firefighters. If employers can successfully argue on the basis of minute differences between the contracts of part-time and wholetime workers then it could make the part-time workers regulations almost meaningless.”

Kent FBU Chair Mark Simmons, whose members are involved in the Court of Appeal case against their Fire Authority, said: “Retained members are fed up with being looked on by management as a Fire Service on the cheap. A firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter. They are doing the same job and they are entitled to the same benefits. Hopefully this case will go some way to rectify that.”

“Retained firefighters have been excluded from a number of employment rights over the years,” said Eddie Carduso, FBU Berkshire Chair, whose members are also taking cases against their Fire Authority. “We listen to the employers talk about the need for change yet they have dragged their feet on this issue for years. Most employers only want change as long as it saves them money and Fire Authorities are no different.”

Helen Hill, Secretary of the Retained National Committee, said retained firefighters are angered by the lack of access to the pension scheme. “This really rankles with the retained membership,” she said. “We’ve had one person in my area recently retired after 42 years as a retained firefighter and he had no pension rights. That is a disgrace.

“Winning this battle would do so much for the morale of those in the Service and such a boost for recruiting new retained

firefighters into the Fire Service. The problem is the employers have fought against it for years although these new regulations have given us another way to challenge them.”

General Secretary Andy Gilchrist said: “Retained firefighters are still treated by employers as second class firefighters only entitled to second class rights. Yet in many parts of the country they are the Fire Service.

“The public in an emergency cannot tell any difference between a retained firefighter and wholetime firefighters because they see them doing the same job. We believe they are entitled to the same pension and sick pay rights as wholetime firefighters and we are prepared to take this case all the way to secure that aim.”

Morris Butterfield, Retained EC Member said retained firefighters make up about a third of the operational Fire Service and are skilled in what they do and flexible in how they do it.

“The employers claim they want a modern Fire Service yet they practise old fashioned discrimination against us”, he said. “The Fire Service will not be modern until we are all treated in the same way and entitled to the same rights.”

Paul Woolstenholmes, National Officer with responsibility for legal matters, said: “In looking for little differences between contracts they failed to acknowledge the big picture which is retained firefighters are firefighters and take the same risks. If they left the court and attended an incident they would not be in any doubt about that.”

Although retained members would have strong views about even being thought of as part-time, those are the only laws which can be used to make the legal challenge.

WORKERS' BEER COMPANY



Sun, fun and Socialism

A FEW members of the Strathclyde Brigade Committee were approached by the Workers' Beer Company to provide a crew for a festival in Glasgow Gigs in the Green 2000. We all had such a fantastic time we decided to provide crews for Glastonbury.

We arrived at Glastonbury around 2am, a fun time to pitch a tent. After managing to erect our tent we stumbled off to the bar, where we found Davy Patton and Brian Joyce raving about the good time they were having. It was a different story the next day watching them crawl out of a tent.

We were sent to work at the District Six bar and after a short health and safety brief we went to work. Crew's work five hour shifts and can spend the rest of the time enjoying the festival and there is a lot to enjoy.

We spent most of our free time at the Left Field.

Davy was speaking at the Left Field along with Bill Spiers, General Secretary of the Scottish TUC, and Billy Bragg – the topic was the importance of trade Unions.

Davy managed to give his speech without breaking into song; however



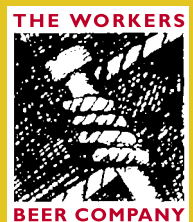
the same cannot be said of Bill Spiers, who couldn't resist. Bill has sung at FBU meetings in Hyde Park, Glasgow and now Glastonbury – he appears to be trying to relive his pop star dreams.

We had such a fabulous time we are sending a crew for Glastonbury 2004. Just praying for sun, fun and Socialism at the Left Field.

■ The Glastonbury Festival takes place on June 25, 26 and 27. Gates open at 10am on 23 June

HAVING FUN IN A GOOD CAUSE

THE name Workers Beer Company came from the 1930s song about 'The very fat man that waters the workers beer'. I can assure you the Workers Beer Company don't.



The Beer

Company offers campaigns and organisations a deal: If members work as volunteers, they will make a donation to the campaign equivalent to the pay they would have received as employees. Strathclyde Brigade Committee donated our wages to Cuba Solidarity.

The Workers' Beer company provide crews for festivals throughout the year and can be contacted at www.workersbeer.co.uk. So get in touch and have some fun while making money for good causes.



Breathing life into fight against African poverty

Britain has promised to propel the African continent up the international agenda during its Presidency of the Group of Eight leading industrialised nations in 2005. For these pledges to translate into the dramatic action needed, the ball must start rolling at the G8 summit this month.



AFRICA is the only continent to have grown poorer in the last 25 years.

Sadly, we are getting all too used to the numerous worthy reports, declarations and summit communiqués promising to turn the tide on Africa's fortunes, but which all end in failure.

So when Tony Blair set up a Commission for Africa in February to "take a fresh look at Africa's past, present and future" in an attempt to resolve the continent's major problems, we Africa campaigners generally responded encouragingly.

Why? Because if there is any chance

that this time, the political will is there, we want to grasp it and turn it into concrete action.

In 2001, Blair described the state of Africa as a "scar on the conscience of the world". Since then the so-called 'development round' trade talks collapsed at Cancun and the war on terror has distracted from African priorities of debt cancellation and tackling of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Now Blair's Commission for Africa promises to put Africa at the top of the international agenda. The Commission,

which must submit its report by next spring in time for the G8 summit in July, promises to address the key issues of the continent's horrific HIV/AIDS crisis, remaining high foreign debts, low foreign aid and the dramatic reduction in Africa's share of global trade.

To ensure concrete action comes out of the Commission, an important first step is Blair using his influence at this year's G8 summit beginning on 8 June in the USA to encourage other G8 leaders to demonstrate their commitment by making big changes in their policies towards Africa.

Aditi Sharma, ACTSA's Campaigns Director said: "We welcome the Prime Minister's commitment on Africa especially at a time when the UK has a unique opportunity to set the agenda with G8 colleagues. This time, though, it is critical we have a sea-change.

"Africans are tired of worthy pledges and initiatives and we will campaign to hold the Government to account on this latest action plan for Africa."

The challenges are immense. One of the biggest tasks is tackling the continent's HIV/AIDS crisis which kills 6,500 people every day. The pandemic is striking at the heart of the economically active population and its impact can be seen in every workplace.

The UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis, has famously accused the Governments of the Western world of "mass murder by complacency" by failing to commit the resources needed to the fight.

Britain's response has been particularly shameful – we are currently providing just a third of our fair share to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, despite it



Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) campaigns for peace, democracy and development across Southern Africa and is the successor to the Anti-Apartheid Movement. To join ACTSA and its campaigns, please see www.actsa.org or contact ACTSA at actsa@actsa.org or on 020 7833 3133.

being hailed as the best chance we have to fight the disease.

In recent years, Africa's share of global trade has been going down. Increased trade could enable African countries to expand and develop more than will ever be possible through aid or debt relief, and the rich world keeps promising that developing countries will be able to trade their way out of poverty.

But the European Union, Africa's most significant trading partner, is putting up barriers to severely limit the produce Africa can sell, threatening the growth of African economies and industries and putting at risk the livelihoods of three quarters of the labour force employed in agriculture

in many Southern African countries.

Despite the hype of debt relief around the millennium, African Governments are still being forced to pay \$14 billion each year in debt repayments. This means critical funds are diverted away from health and education budgets in some of the world's poorest countries.

If Britain is to emerge as an example the world's other richest countries can follow, it needs to make significant strides forward in all of these challenges. ACTSA is campaigning with trade unionists across the UK to ensure that the Government knows the British public cares about Africa's future and that this time, it delivers on its promises.

ON THE MOVE?

Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.

CUBA

In March 2004 Phil Micallef had the opportunity to join a delegation to Cuba organised by the Institute of Employment Rights. The delegation of eight reflected the make up of the Institute and included EC member Brian Joyce and other trade unionists, academics and lawyers from the UK. The purpose of the delegation was to participate in an international meeting of labour lawyers and trade unionists organised by the Central Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), the Cuban equivalent of our TUC.



This monument was erected around 1910 in memory of firefighters who died in a fire that ravaged the island's capital at the turn of the century. It was financed by citizens of Havana, who pulled together in recognition of the firefighters' bravery and self-sacrifice.

Constructive

FOR the past four years, bilateral meetings between the Cubans and the National Lawyers Guild of the United States (a group of progressive lawyers from America) had been taking place.

In 2003 the Americans and Cubans invited a UK delegation to join the discussion and our trip in 2004 was the second such joint meeting to take place. Particularly welcomed at the meeting was an excellent report by the Institute, which sympathetically examined workers' rights and labour relations in Cuba.

The timing of the event could not have been better. At the 2003 Trade Union Congress, the FBU participated in the Congress discussion on Cuba. The National Union of Journalists moved a resolution "condemning the intensifying and hostile attempts by the United States to undermine the self-determination and economic position of Cuba".

For our part, the FBU added an amendment to the resolution, which applauded the social priorities of the Cuban Government and welcomed the medical support given by Cuba to other third world countries. It called on the British Government to resume construc-

tive engagement with Cuba.

So when approached by the Institute of Employment Rights to nominate FBU representatives to join the delegation, the FBU Executive Council were only too happy to constructively engage in the event!

The trip was a good balance between theoretical discussion, practical experiences and cultural exploration. The first two days were spent soaking up the history and culture of Havana.

Whether it was visiting the Museum of the Revolution, walking along the Malecon scanning the waters separating Cuba from Florida or taking a horse-drawn trip round the cobbled streets of Old Havana – every step introduced us to the rich Cuban lifestyle.

Down one street we fell upon a small junior school. Knowing that Cuba has a fine reputation for the provision of education, we stopped to observe. We were immediately invited into the classroom by the teacher and the children welcomed us by singing Cuban songs.

CUBAN FIREFIGHTERS UNION

WE also visited our Cuban counterparts, the Sindicato Civiles de la Defensa

The American blockade on Cuba has led to the relatively high death rate among firefighters. They lack modern equipment and lack of finances means the infrastructure is crumbling, further increasing the risk to firefighters



engagement

(SNTCD), headed by General Secretary, Jose A. Roque Arias Secretario General.

One of the points to come out of our discussion with Roque was the disturbing news that workplace deaths are higher for firefighters than any other industrial sector in Cuba. Given the high quality of training and the excellent health and safety regime followed, the high number of deaths seemed out of step with their worker-focused approach.

US BLOCKADE

HOWEVER, when you remember that the American blockade on Cuba has prevented financial support, medical aid and other necessary modern tools reaching the shores of Cuba, the reasons for the high death rate become clearer.

Cuban firefighters lack the modern equipment enjoyed in other countries. Similarly, while the buildings adorning the Cuban skyline are impressive, lack of finances mean the infrastructure is crumbling and firefighters have little chance of surviving a collapsing building.

The serious part of the trip involved a two day conference in Havana followed by a trip to the province of Matanzas to

meet worker representatives. The theme of the conference was The New Economic World Order and its effects on Workers. The conference was opened by the leader of the Cuban delegation – Raul Hodein – a member of the CTC National Secretariat. He emphasised the importance of bringing international academics, lawyers and trade unionists together and noted that despite any differences in ideology, there is more to unite than divide us.

Dean Hubbard, leader of the American delegation outlined the importance of ILO standards to improving workers' rights and controlling the worst effects of free-market, neo-liberal policies. He noted that as Government intervention in the West has been transferred to corporate bodies, influenced only by shareholders, Cuba offers an alternative solution.

Other issues discussed included the role of labour lawyers in a globalised world; Unions and their mechanisms for regional integration and working strategies in favour of global justice. A report was also given on developments in the case of the Miami Five – five Cuban men imprisoned in America on trumped up charges of spying on the US.

CUBAN WORKPLACES

To support the theoretical work of the conference, the delegation was also taken on practical visits. In the Province of Matanzas we toured a factory producing cereals, cakes and biscuits and spoke to representatives of both management and Unions. We then visited a building site, where a new hotel was being built to service the growing tourist sector within Cuba. In both workplaces the delegation of around 40 people were given every opportunity to raise questions about working conditions, management/Union relations and the role of society in general. Our final visit was to a small town where we met the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution.

CDRs can be found all over Cuba. Their role is to promote healthy living, provide assistance with health and housing issues and to deal with local problems – a kind of shop-stewards committee for the community!

The trip was a great success and we appreciate the work of the Institute of Employment Rights in organising the event. Already the Institute is discussing how best to develop this initiative, both with further trips to Cuba and by arranging for Cubans to visit the UK. We will do all we can to welcome any Cuban comrades – particularly if they bring some Havana rum and Cuban cigars!

Phil Micallef is Vice President and EC Member for Region 5

INTERNATIONAL ROUND-UP

JAMAICAN FIREFIGHTERS

The Joint Confederation of Trade Unions (JCTU) has issued a strong warning to the Jamaican Government of premier PJ Patterson over plans to make big staff cuts in the island's Fire Service.

Local Government Minister Portia Simpson-Miller has warned of possible job losses, blaming budgetary constraints in the current financial year could not finance the operations of the Jamaica Fire Brigade.

But the JCTU made it clear that no staff cuts in the public service will be accepted by the trade union movement during the period of the Memorandum of Understanding, a wage restraint agreement signed with the Government in February, which was supposed to see the Government withdraw its plans to cut some 15,000 public sector jobs.

Prime Minister Patterson has sought the involvement of the private sector in the incomes policy too.

At the time of signing, Minister of Finance and Planning Dr. Omar Davies, who led the Government side in the three-month talks leading up deal, said the MOU provided a "concrete basis for the development of a broader social contract."

The Government has argued that the agreement would help reign in the country's growing wage bill, which stood at over \$45 billion for the April-December period, \$4 billion above budget, and will help combat the current economic crisis.

FRENCH PROTESTS IN CANNES

French entertainment industry workers briefly brought the fourth day of the Cannes film festival to a halt last month with a loud march in front of the red carpet that attracted the support of US director Michael Moore.

The demonstration by around 500 workers angry over Government cuts to their unemployment benefits paralysed the seafront area of the Riviera town for about two hours.

Several screenings were interrupted or cancelled.

In one case, a dozen workers who pushed their way into a theatre were forcibly removed by police, resulting in three people being slightly injured, according to Unions and officers.

Riot police closed off all the streets around the six-storey building hosting most of the sprawling festival, causing major traffic snarls, while security guards hastily locked doors to prevent the protesters getting inside.

The protest was the biggest yet by the entertainment workers, who dropped a threat to sabotage the festival after organisers promised them public occasions to state their case.

They drafted in Moore and the French anti-globalisation campaigner José Bové to bring media attention to their dispute.

Moore, a left-wing polemicist, said: "I'm here to support workers in France, the United States and all around the world," he said in a brief speech at the start of the

march before leaving.

Bové, who has a record of leading high-profile actions against France's centre-right Government, with a particular distaste of genetic engineering, said the cuts to the workers' benefits were "unacceptable".

"It's living culture which is in the process of being destroyed," he added.

The Government tightened requirements and pay-outs for employees in the arts, culture and entertainment sector last year in a bid to rein in the benefit fund's 800-million-euro annual deficit.

Staff at the luxury Carlton Hotel, where Cannes jury president Quentin Tarantino is a guest, have also gone on strike over pay and conditions at a time when 5,000 journalists are in town, offering them a perfect publicity platform.

www.labourstart.org

IRANIAN WORKERS RELEASED

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has welcomed the release of seven Iranian workers, arrested during peaceful celebrations in the city of Saqez' to mark May Day.

Subjected to physical harassment during arrest, the seven detainees were held without charge for 12 days in Sannadaj and Saqez'. The ICFTU had campaigned incessantly for their release, writing to the Iranian President Khatami and requesting for International Labour Organisation (ILO) intervention to help

guarantee the release of the unlawfully detained workers.

On 1st May Iranian authorities swooped in and arrested Mahmoud Salehi, a well-known labour leader who had been arrested and imprisoned for 10 months in 2001, two local labour leaders Jalal Hosseini and Mohammad Abdipoor, and Mohsen Hakimi, a well-known member of the Iranian Writers' Association.

IRAQ PRISONER ABUSE CONDEMNED

The ICFTU has condemned acts of abuse and violence by coalition forces against prisoners detained in Iraq.

Allegations of violence, humiliation and even killing of prisoners must be fully and openly investigated, and any persons responsible for carrying out such extreme violations of international law must be brought to justice, according to the world's largest international trade Union confederation.

Inhuman and degrading treatment of this sort is totally unacceptable, and discredits not only the perpetrators, but also those in positions of responsibility, who must bear the consequences for acts committed by persons under their authority.

The ICFTU calls for full cooperation by all parties with the investigation being undertaken by the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). The Confederation also fully supports Acting UNHRC Commissioner Bertrand Ramcharan's appeal last month for greater scrutiny of the situation in Iraq.

www.icftu.org

LETTERS

THANKS TO THE FBU

Dear Firefighter

After three and half years I am pleased to be able to report that my fight for compensation has finally been settled, out of Court.

I would like to record my sincere thanks to both my Union Representative, Andy Dodson, and to Gerard Stilliard, of Thompsons Solicitors, both of whom were enormously supportive throughout this protracted ordeal.

Without the FBU, I doubt I would have had the courage or tenacity to pursue my case.

**Geoff Nolan
London**



GET RID OF BLAIR

Dear Firefighter

Prompted by Kevin Maguire's appraisal of the Labour Link, I have to say that like many I am incensed at the way Tony Blair has commandeered the Labour Party. He has no regard for Socialism or the fair distribution of the nation's wealth.

I have belonged to the Labour Party since I joined the League of Youth in 1948. In 1998, after just one year as Prime Minister, I decided that Blair was not going to do anything that would benefit the hard pressed workers and their Trade Unions.

Blair is an authoritarian, ruling with the help of the official spokesman of Downing Street and unelected cronies in various hideaways, not least the House of Lords.

The problem with the New Labour Party, Parliamentary democracy, and the country is Blair – the man who's got everything wrong.

I would say to all left of centre MPs in the Party that it is your honour bound duty to unite and do something positive and useful for those who elected you to serve them in Parliament.

Get rid of Blair.

Pete Giblin

OOT Kingston upon Hull East



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.**

DIARY

Tuesday June 15–Thursday June 17	SOUTHPORT
Reconvened Annual Conference	
Saturday June 19	LONDON
National Pay Up for Pensions demo	
Saturday July 3	LONDON
Pride parade and rally	
Friday 16 July–Sunday 18 July	DORSET
Tolpuddle Festival 2004	
Saturday July 17	LONDON
Respect Festival	
Monday 13 September–Thursday 16 September	BRIGHTON
TUC Conference 2004	
Sunday 26 September–Thursday 30 September	BRIGHTON
Labour Party Conference	
Friday, 8 October –	WORTLEY HALL
Sunday 10 October	
FBU Black and Ethnic Minority Members School	
Friday 15 October–Sunday 17 October	WORTLEY HALL
FBU Gay and Lesbian School	
Saturday 30 October–Friday 5 November	WORTLEY HALL
FBU National School	

PAY UP FOR PENSIONS

TUC MARCH AND RALLY

NPC TUC

London, Saturday 19 June
Assemble from 12 noon
 Temple Tube, Embankment
March 1pm
Rally 2pm Trafalgar Square

Show your support for a better pensions deal for all!

Details of route and transport arrangements:
www.tuc.org.uk/pensionsrally

25 YEAR BADGES



Divisional Officer Mark Skelton of Hamilton Fire Station, Strathclyde receives his 25 year badge from Divisional delegate Alan Kane



Sub Officers Mick Hockley, Keith Hambleton and Trevor Johns receive their 25 year badges



Mike Ridley of Cardiff Central receiving his 25 year badge from Branch rep Dom Stokes



Pete Kerr, Phil Abraham, Paul Collins, Bob Kerley, Kevin Case, (Phil Hatchard), Dave Armstrong and Steve Mant all receive their 25 year badges from Karen Adams, The Brigade Secretary. Phil Hatchard and Kevin Case also received a presentation to mark their retirement as Brigade Officials.



Sub Officer Paul Furler from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Sec Lff Mike Graham



Sub Officer Gary Clement from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Sec Lff Mike Graham.



Steve Johncock from Exmouth Fire Station in Devon receives his 25 year badge from Branch Sec Lff Mike Graham



Mark Aahley receives his 25 year badge



Richard Bond (Green Watch Wandsworth) receiving his 25 year badge from Branch Chair Graeme Lester



Keith Forward receives his 25 year badge from Matt Wrack