

OUTRAGE AT ATTACKS ON OUR PENSIONS

Firefighters across the South West are expressing their anger at the ongoing attack on our pensions. The Government has indicated that they will accept the "Hutton proposals" which will mean increasing Firefighters retirement age, cutting their pension provision, and upping their pension contributions.

Firefighters in the South West believe these proposals to be totally unjust and see them as a further attack on their profession when they are already facing pay freezes and massive cuts. The FBU has promised to oppose any attack on the pension scheme and has pointed out that Firefighters already pay up to 11% contributions and that Fire Service pensions underwent a major reform and "modernisation" only a few years ago.

Tam McFarlane, FBU Executive member for the Region says "FBU members across the South West, from Gloucestershire to Cornwall, have been contacting the Union and expressing their opposition and condemnation of the attacks on our pensions which will mean that Firefighters will have to pay more, work longer and get less. There is absolutely no recognition of the dangerous and physically demanding nature of a Firefighters role or the massive personal financial contribution that our Members make towards their pension."



TAM MCFARLANE
FBU EC MEMBER

The firefighters' pension has been reformed substantially as recently as 2006 and is already fair, sustainable and affordable. Subsequent changes in ill health provision have also achieved further savings in the scheme and the Union rejects as an insult and a myth any suggestion that Firefighters pensions are "gold plated".

Tam goes on to say: "Firefighting is a very physical profession which is at the cutting edge of front line emergency services. Our Members put themselves at enormous risk to serve the public in the most dangerous of circumstances. Their pensions are not a privilege or a bonus; they are a very hard earned and necessary part of the profession. If the Government get their way these hard earned pensions will be lost and our Members plans for the future will be destroyed. We will be taking legal action in regard to one of the changes: Government plans to change the rate of indexation for public sector pensions from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the lower Consumer Price Index (CPI), but all FBU Members need to play their part at a political and if necessary industrial level if we are going to fight off the other attacks."

The attacks on our pensions come at the same time as our pay is being undermined. Last year our employers said they would give us no rise at all and now the Government is saying that public sector pay is to be frozen for a further 2 years. Unless we fight back, all of this will mean that Firefighters face 3 years of pay freezes at the same time as inflation is rising, our pension contributions are increasing and VAT and other costs of living are going through the roof. This situation is very real and very dangerous for our profession and our livelihoods. We urge all members to attend forthcoming branch meetings where these issues and how we are going to fight them, will be discussed.

EXTRA COST TO YOU PER MONTH

PAY FREEZE £120

PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS £70

V.A.T. RISE £40

CAN YOU AFFORD NOT TO FIGHT?

SPRING 2011



Avon FBVU's

NON
2
Fire Deaths

FDO'S TAKE HIT

Austerity measures announced by the CFO have already caused substantial changes to the way we operate. A massive 25% reduction in our Flexi Duty Officers will undoubtedly have a substantial affect on how AFRS go about their business. At recent meetings with the CFO's negotiating officer ACFO Jon Day, we came to the agreement that FDO's workloads and indeed work patterns will need to be carefully looked at and assessed. The FBU executive insisted that officer's welfare would have to be monitored and made a priority. A lot of anxiety was understandably felt at the recent section meetings and the fact that the service are not replacing officers who have retired or started part time contracts is already adding to workloads. This makes it imperative that consultation on the patterns of work undertaken by the officer's members be made a priority.

STATION 25 — COMMON SENSE PREVAILS

ACFO Day was tasked to look at the workings of Station 25 with the FBU executive a number of months ago. This was brought about after Station 25 personnel had organised a well attended meeting at Station 11 Speedwell, which was attended by the Brigade Chair. As a result of that meeting, commitment was given by the executive to take their injustices forward and to obtain a resolution. Stn 25 personnel, following consultation between the service and the FBU, will now be receiving confirmation of their substantive role, watch and station shortly. Most will know their final destination by June 1st, however, some may have a temporary posting until the final picture is uncovered later in the year due to restructuring. This is a major step forward and we feel a common sense approach has prevailed. We have always felt that the maintenance of the 'team ethic' is paramount to good working practices, and in conjunction with a good structured training regime, this is what we are committed to achieve for members within Avon.

FLEXIBLE 42 HOURS

Day duty staff have been told they will have to start working flexibly and fulfil their full contract of 42 hours. Of course we know that the members working this system are already amongst the most flexible within the service, and that the amount of work undertaken in 'goodwill' is considerable. However the board felt they were being short changed and now they want to put a system of working practices together that will in effect take the good out of 'goodwill'.

After numerous drafts, bordering on the ridiculous, the Executive along with the local Day Duty Rep, have arrived at an acceptable document. It is important that members don't get drawn into doing some of the practices which are far too flexible for the new 'flexible' policy. Should any members endure any issues at the onset of the policy, please ensure that the Avon FBU executive are contacted to resolve the situation.

AERIAL CAPABILITIES

The membership will be aware of the changes in AFRS aerial fleet in recent years. Indeed the FBU where amongst the personnel which looked at the ARP's in Strathclyde, before the purchase of our vehicles currently based at Patchway and Bedminster. Having said that, it is no secret that the teething problems of the ARP's is something that has not benefitted the Service. Unfortunately, this is an all too common theme for this type of appliance all over the British Fire Service; indeed we have probably done better than most on the amount of time vehicles have spent in workshops.

With these apparent shortfalls highlighted, the executive have been pressing the Service to look at the Fleets aerial capacity. We have for sometime been pushing for a decision on the replacement of our 'Turntable Ladders' and thankfully the CFO as agreed to purchase 2 new 'TL's' out of the next two years Fleet replacement programme.

This is a major breakthrough in AFRS maintaining a bespoke 'TL' capability throughout the Avon area. We will now be asking for a group of professionals to be part of a working party to assess the best vehicles for purpose.

**SAFER
FIREFIGHTERS
SAFER
COMMUNITIES**

Chair Chris.Taylor@fbu.org.uk
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On the 31st March 2011 Brother Chris “Jacko” Jackson retired from the Fire Service after 32 years service. As I’m sure you all know, Jacko for the last 6 years has had the unenviable task of being the Avon FBU Brigade Secretary. To say he held the post through times of change is an understatement. He kept the executive focused on achieving what is the least affected Fire Service in relation to “a change for change sake agenda” since the 2003 National dispute throughout the British Fire Service.

His drive and energy were his weapons, along with an amazing knack to retain information, this allowed the executive to answer all the weird and wonderful ideas to come out of the original IRMP drafts and to argue that certain changes would be detrimental rather than beneficial to the service that we deliver.

On the 25th March an informal drink was arranged at the ‘51 Stokes Croft’ watering hole to celebrate Jacko’s career. Those of you who attended will know the night was an overwhelming success welcoming old comrades’ from the “out of trade” section of our great union. As you can imagine there were stories & more stories bounded around, mainly about the many exploits, scrapes and near misses that our colourful ex secretary had got himself into and a great time was had by all.

Jon Day presented Chris with a ceremonial axe and Brigade Chair Chris Taylor presented him with a Bronze statue of a fire fighter, on behalf of the Brigade committee. Chris’ wife Lyn received a large bouquet of flowers as a reward for “putting up with Jacko for all these years”. On a serious note Chris Taylor thanked Bro Jackson on behalf of the FBU for all the dedicated work he had put into the union over the last 32 years which ranged from H&S rep, Branch rep at both Temple & Bedminster, Union Learning rep and of course Brigade Secretary.

SWITCH CREWING? NO THANKS!

This term is one that as been repeated over and over for a number of years, one that has been defiantly rejected over and over by the Executive. We have been told time and time again that “we are the only service that do not do it”. We have constantly replied that we are only concerned with what is best for Avon’s communities and not the cut culture arguments of Fire Authorities up and down the country. In fairness, AFRS have accepted our arguments but with the ‘comprehensive spending review’ and the massive cut in Government funding to the Fire Service in Avon, the old subject is once again rearing its ugly head.



Our fire and rescue service is UNDER ATTACK

We face the most serious onslaught on our service in living memory:

- 25% cuts
- Pay freeze
- Attacks on pensions
- Thousands of jobs facing the axe
- Duty systems and conditions of service under threat
- Regionalisation of fire controls to proceed **DEBATED!**

The CFO had made it clear to the Combined Fire Authority that 48 operational jobs could be looked at using the concept of ‘Switch crewing’ on Specials in order to maintain ‘frontline services’. Your executive have always maintained that the concept of switch crewing would not achieve that in an acceptable way, it would down grade cover for the communities we serve and increase risk to all.

We have made it clear that we would fight vehemently against the loss of our rescue capability in every way possible. That started with the lobbying of MP’s which culminated in a number of meetings with the CFO and individual MP’s. All this work has paid off with the service on the instructions of the CFO being told to “look outside the box” regarding the maintenance of operational cover for Rescues. We have now been invited to look objectively at a new concept of ‘Rescue pumps’, which we are informed will carry the essential equipment already carried on our ‘Rescue Tenders’ plus the retention of specialised Tenders for both Animal and Large Goods Vehicles. A group of professional members’ with expertise in rescue equipment and just as importantly, operational procedures, will now evaluate these vehicles.

The executive will continue to fight to maintain the services that our communities deserve. We will continue to oppose quick fixes and encourage AFRS to assess decisions in terms of operational services and effectiveness, not cost cutting which affects detrimentally the services provided. AFRS have always rejected a cuts for cuts sake agenda and we will do all we can to ensure that the Service maintain that policy.

After dragging myself away from Jacko's retirement do at a reasonable hour, all that remained to do was to get some kip in anticipation of the next day's massive demo. After dropping off my partner Linda, on victoria street to sell Socialist Worker to those on Unite coaches, I went to greet all the FBU comrades who started assembling at Temple. We had retired and serving FF's, from control, patchway, training, Bris and Speedwell when the coach arrived the guys jumped on to go to Bath, but I had to collect Linda and 6 students who we had agreed to get to London. That is one of the key things on these occasions, the solidarity we give to other sections of our class and the Students were "made up" the FBU got them to the Demo.



When we all got to Bath the remainder of our crowd boarded and swelled our number to 26 in total. It would be great to fill the coach next time but that is up to all of you lot. More Control, Yate, Bath and Station 25 (RIP!) members got on and we were off.

As we entered the Capital we just ignored the signs, coppers etc and ploughed on as far as we could get, eventually dropping off almost in Parliament square in true FBU style! Most of our delegation were forced to march over Vauxhall bridge as the Police blocked our way for the first time that day. We ended up catching a boat

down the Thames to join the march on Victoria embankment. The March was already moving off as we were floating by and it looked spectacular. There were at least 500,000 on the streets that day to show the Tories our strength and passion, as we believe in public services and see no reason for any cuts at all. The case has not been made for these cuts we have sustained a far higher level of debt after the war in paying off the US, so these attacks are about making the rich richer and us poorer, by working longer hours and years for less pay and pensions. It is the banks that stole our money and tax dodgers who ain't paid, if we got that back there is no problem! Fight back you must.

As we jogged down the march to meet up with the FBU comrades we passed CWU, NUT, NASUWT, and marchers from many other unions. The RMT band was right next to the FBU, and we were really well represented, Matt Wrack (Gen Sec FBU) reckoned it was the biggest turn out of FBU for a non FBU rally, but we can all do better next time. The march was really slow as there were so many people on it but I still managed to meet up with FBU members from Essex, Staffs, Berks, South Wales, Cambs, Suffolk, Somerset and more. Most of these members are known to me from Conference and Union School, the comrades you make are friends for life and one of the real advantages of being active in the Union. I recommend getting involved.



It was a fantastic day and a real slap in the face to the Tories who thought that level of march was beyond us, nothing is beyond us when we fight together. This was the biggest march in Trade Union history and second only to the 2million Stop the War march in 2003. Right after the weekend the Tories changed their policy on EMA, then we had the Health Unions knock back the tories NHS reforms. Marches and demos really work, they are the only language these Tory wreckers understand. We have a massive battle on our hands to defend all the gains our class has made in the last 60 years, but we are up for it and by striking back we will defend Jobs Services and Pensions for us and our kids. Stand with us, the next step is to demand a general strike on June 30th, all workers out on strike together, to see the Tories off. Make sure you are all on the next demo. See you on the big one!

Jaz Thomas 04

