



The Premier Trade Union for Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff: January 2015

## FIGHTING FOR A FAIR FUTURE!

**FBU LEADER PAYS TRIBUTE TO FIREFIGHTERS DEFENDING FIRE SERVICE!**



BANNERS FROM ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST MARCHING TOGETHER IN BUCKS

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack has praised Firefighters for their unity and commitment in the campaign for fair pensions and for the continuing fight against dangerous cuts to the frontline Fire Service.

Speaking as the New Year begins, Matt said “2014 has been a year of protest, demonstration and struggle for firefighters. As we enter a new year, I would like to pay tribute to all those members who have been solidly campaigning throughout the year for a fair pension settlement or against cuts to our service.

“Politicians will know by now how passionate and knowledgeable we are about this cause having taken another 24 hour period of strike action on 9 December.

Our message is clear; we are not going away!”

The message came after Firefighters throughout England displayed their unity and determination during a 24hr strike for pension justice and then achieved an unprecedented Parliamentary debate and vote in the House of Commons.

The Parliamentary debate, which took place on 15 December, was forced by a tremendous effort from FBU members who lobbied MP’s across the UK to support an Early Day Motion calling for the pension regulations to be annulled.

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***Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service***



***Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff***

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# FIGHTING FOR A FAIR FUTURE: FIREFIGHTERS STRIKE FOR FAIR PENSIONS AND FORCE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

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The FBU campaign for fair pensions in the Fire Service had an unprecedented achievement when Firefighters forced a parliamentary debate and vote on the controversial regulations that the Government plan to introduce in England.

The debate, which the FBU, the Labour party and even some government MP's called for, took place on Monday 15 December on the floor of the House of Commons and was watched by hundreds of Firefighters who had managed to get a place in the public galleries.

No other Union has achieved such a Parliamentary debate, despite massive pension cuts across the public sector, and it forced Fire Minister Penny Mordant to be held to account over an unworkable and unsustainable pension scheme that will see 60 year olds running into burning buildings to rescue people.

During the debate MPs from across the political spectrum attacked the Government plans, raising serious concerns and seeking key assurances to protect firefighters. Following the debate a vote was called for the regulations to be annulled but the government whipped its MPs' and won the vote 313 to 261.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said "During the debate speaker after speaker demolished the government's arguments over firefighter fitness, redeployment and the solutions being found in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Indeed, nobody on the government side, apart from the minister, even attempted to put a case for the pension changes.

***"There is no question – we won the debate.*** However the government whipped its MPs and won the vote. Members can still be proud of what we achieved."

"This does not mean the campaign is over by any means. This is a campaign being fought politically, legally and

industrially. This debate and vote was just one of many fronts we are fighting on

Although several key areas of concern remain unaddressed, the debate did outline a crucial issue; the question of what would happen should a firefighter fail a fitness test through no fault of his or her own.

During the debate the DCLG Fire Minister clarified that this is the case in several responses, including this one:



Peter Bone MP (Con): ***"The one problem is that firefighters are genuinely worried that when they get to 55 they might, through no fault of their own, lose their pension. If the Minister could give me an assurance that those firefighters would be redeployed?"***

Response from Penny Mordant: ***"I am very happy to give those assurances. We have done that. If someone fails a fitness test through no fault of their own and they do not qualify for ill health retirement, they will get a redeployed role or an unreduced pension. That will be put on a statutory footing in the national framework – a full, unreduced pension, if not***

***an alternative role."***

Following this debate the DCLG Fire Minister wrote to the FBU and confirmed that a decision had been taken in Parliament with the full understanding that should a firefighter fail a fitness test through no fault of his or her own, the Fire Authority should consider suitable alternative employment, and if that is not possible and the employee is at least age 55, commence an Authority-initiated retirement and pay an unreduced pension.

This position was also confirmed the following day by the DCLG Secretary of State Eric Pickles at the Communities and Local Government Committee.

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## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

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In response to these developments Matt Wrack said “If this is correct, it is clearly a welcome move and could address one of our key concerns. The assurances given by Penny Mordaunt are a departure from the previous position adopted by DCLG.”

“If the decision of Parliament provides the guarantee of an unreduced pension then clearly that would be a significant move from DCLG. On the other hand, if such a guarantee does not, in fact exist, then the firm assurances given in Parliament would turn out to be false – which would be a very serious matter indeed.

“Therefore a key task for us all is to obtain clarity on this point”. The Union is now working to ensure that any guarantee given in the House of Commons is honoured.

We have written to Penny Mordaunt seeking a further meeting as early as possible. We have suggested that this



legal position is and how any guarantee will be honoured.

An obvious question which arises from this is what Labour would do if they were to form a Government after the election in May this year. They would have the power to make changes to the pension scheme.

We are therefore continuing our discussion with senior Labour MPs about what might be possible and what assurances Labour might give on these issues. Again, members will appreciate the importance of this and the importance of continued lobbying around these issues.

All of these developments will be discussed and debated at a recall of the FBU Conference which will take place in February.

Make sure you have your say - attend your local Branch meeting and make sure your voice is heard on this vital issue!

meeting involves lawyers from each side – so that the legal position for individual firefighters can be clarified. We have stressed the importance of such a meeting so that all parties are clear about what the

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## SOLIDARITY WITH RICKY MATTHEWS!

Firefighters demonstrated their solidarity and determination when they travelled in large numbers to support victimised firefighter and executive council member Ricky Matthews who was sacked for taking lawful strike action by Buckinghamshire Fire Authority.

Firefighters from every Brigade in the South West joined over 3000 colleagues to march through Aylesbury in protest at the decision to sack Ricky and to demand his reinstatement.

Ricky was summarily dismissed for supporting the FBU strike from 31 October to 4 November. His employer claimed that the FBU had issued an incorrect strike call in Buckinghamshire. They completely misunderstood, or misrepresented, the legal position. After taking additional



Tam McFarlane (R) in solidarity with Ricky Matthews

expert legal advice, the FBU responded to their claims. They did not attempt to challenge the FBU legally – and have still not done so.

South West rep Tam McFarlane said “Banners and Firefighters of the South

West FBU joined this demo in support of our colleague Ricky Matthews, travelling to Bucks from as far as Cornwall to protest against his disgraceful sacking. This is an attack on us all and we were sending a clear message that if a rogue employer attacks one FBU member then they take on all of us. Having spoken with Ricky I know that he was very touched by the number of members who came out to support him. An injury to one is an injury to all. We must all unite to defend Ricky.”

An online petition (available on the FBU website) has attracted thousands of signatures and the FBU is now beginning legal proceedings against Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Authority.

# FIRE AUTHORITIES VOTE TO COMBINE DORSET AND WILTSHIRE

## **Politicians Pledge “Full Strength Frontline Services”**

At a special meeting of Wiltshire & Swindon Fire Authority on the 11 November politicians voted unanimously in favour of combining with neighbouring Dorset. Dorset Fire Authority had also unanimously agreed to the move at a meeting held on 4 November.

The FBU represented Firefighters at both meetings and made a full, locally based written submission to each of the consultation processes. We received a great deal of correspondence from Authority members in response to our submission and the FBU documents were referred to throughout the meeting, with many councillors stating their agreement at the views expressed and admiration for the detailed and professional submission made by the Union.

The Chair of Wiltshire Fire Authority stated that he “agreed almost entirely with the FBU submission” and has now given a public commitment that a future Service will retain “full strength frontline services, a full suite of fire stations and no redundancy of firefighters.” This is a commitment which the FBU had sought in our submissions and one which we will hold any future Authority to.

The FBU has now been contacted by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), who are the Government Department responsible for Fire, inviting us to comment on a separate consultation being run on the proposed merger by the Government. The Union is currently developing our response and will be

submitting that shortly. Subject to the political process, the decisions will bring an end to Wiltshire and Dorset Fire & Rescue Services as we currently recognise them, with the intention of a new combined Service to come into being from 1st April 2016.

Brent Thorley, FBU rep for Wiltshire, said “Now that this decision is made, we will be meeting with our FBU colleagues in Dorset at the earliest opportunity to instigate a programme of joint working which will place the views and needs of Firefighters across both Brigades at the heart of our work going forward. We will be writing to the Fire Authority asking that a process be set up as early as possible in order to discuss future working practices, contractual arrangements, policies, operational guidance/response and all the many other issues that will need to be agreed for any future service. The same processes that we are currently undergoing with regards to the Control merger.”

Karen Adams, FBU rep for Dorset said “Although this decision, brought about by politically motivated funding cuts, will mean an end to Dorset FRS, at least we now know where our future lies after all the

uncertainty. I want to reassure all members that the FBU will continue to fight for proper funding, both now and in the future, and we will demand that any future Fire & Rescue Service be driven by the operational needs of a life saving emergency service, that does not come at the expense of, or is detrimental to, the professionals that work within it.”

See more, including the FBU submissions, at: [www.southwestfbu.com](http://www.southwestfbu.com)



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## FBU SOUTH WEST

The Fire Brigades Union is the premier Trade Union for professional Firefighters and Control Staff across the UK. The South West Region is the largest Region in England and we cover Avon, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon & Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire FRS's.

We represent over 85% of uniformed staff across the UK. Our members cover every role from Firefighter to Area Manager, including the retained duty system. We are committed to protecting our Members, their interests at work and to ensuring that the public receive an excellent and professional Fire & Rescue Service. Join the professionals, contact us at: [www.southwestfbu.com](http://www.southwestfbu.com)



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