



The Premier Trade Union for Professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff: July 2011

## WORK LONGER, PAY MORE & GET LESS!



**FBU CONDEMNS  
"DISGRACEFUL"  
GOVERNMENT ATTACK  
ON FIRE SERVICE  
PENSIONS.**

**UNION PLEDGES TO  
FIGHT IN ORDER TO  
ACHIEVE PENSION  
JUSTICE FOR  
FIREFIGHTERS!**

**FBU CALLS ON "ALL  
MEMBERS" TO GET  
INVOLVED IN THE  
CAMPAIGN TO STOP  
PENSION CUTS**

The Fire Brigades Union has slammed Government pension proposals which the Union says will force Firefighters to pay significantly more in the short term before **scrapping** current Fire Service pension schemes in 2015 and **forcing** Firefighters onto a new scheme which will include making most members work a lot longer for less benefits.

In an interview with South West EC member Tam McFarlane, the FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said "the Government currently shows no sign of backtracking on their plans to cut our Members pensions. Because of this the

message to all our members is that they need **to prepare for strike action**. Nobody wants this but they are coming to take away our pension rights and we are determined to fight it".

The General Secretary gave this message at a national Union meeting in Manchester where Officials met to organise the FBU's national campaign to defend our pensions. A video of the interview is available on the South West FBU Facebook page. Read how you can get involved in this issue of FBU South West.



**Fighting for the Fire & Rescue Service**

**Protecting Firefighters & Control Staff**

**YouGov Poll - Nearly half of Firefighters will consider leaving the service if pension cuts are pushed through**

Nearly half the country's firefighters will consider leaving the service if the Government pushes through pension plans meaning paying more, working longer and getting less. The FBU warn that pension changes risk devastating morale and damaging the fire service.

Key changes are to increase contribution rates in the main Firefighters Pensions Scheme from 11% to 14% for firefighters and to 17% for officers. The Government also wants to raise the retirement age from 55 to 60 and switch from a final salary scheme to career average earnings. The union has warned that even the fittest firefighter will struggle to fight fires in their late 50s.

The findings come from a YouGov poll for the FBU which found nearly half (45%) saying they would consider leaving the fire service in the future if the changes are pushed through. 62% said the changes - impacting more heavily on officers - would affect their decision to apply for promotion.

The Union says that the Government needs to wake up and change their plans before lasting damage is done to the service.

See the survey in full at: [www.southwestfbu.com](http://www.southwestfbu.com)

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# HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS!

The FBU recently took the very unusual step of arranging a special meeting of every Brigade Official in the country to relay the Union's fightback against pension cuts.

Officials in the South West joined their colleagues throughout the UK to receive a full briefing on the Government's planned cuts and hear presentations from the President and General Secretary regarding the Unions fightback in defence of our Members pensions.

It is vital to remember that *everyone on every duty system* is affected. There are four Pension Schemes in the fire service and all of them are under the same disgraceful attack.

These schemes are:

- the 1992 Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS);
- the 2006 New Firefighters Pension Scheme (NFPS);
- the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS);
- the proposed Modified Pension Scheme (for RDS members who joined the service before April 2006).

Under the Government's plans each scheme will see an employee contribution *increase* of around 3% from April 2012 and will be *closed* in 2015 when members will be placed into a new, and worse scheme(s).

The phrase we 'work longer, pay more and get less' accurately describes the government's intention towards our pensions.

The Government proposals form a two stage attack:

**Stage 1** - increasing employee contributions - from April 2012 until April 2014;

**Stage 2** - transferring everyone into pension schemes based around a generic framework from 2015.

Talks between Government and the TUC on the overall principles of public sector pension reform are ongoing but the Government has

shown absolutely no intention of backing down. In addition, the Government now wants to begin "scheme level" negotiations to begin. For the Fire Service, this would mean the FBU negotiating on FRS specific pensions.

## **Increasing employee contributions – Paying more**

The Government has stated their intention to *increase* our pension contributions in stages over the next 3 years (2012, 2013, 2014) so that by April 2014 we will be paying an *extra 3.2%*.

This increase would mean that by 2014 Firefighters in the FPS could be paying *over 14%* of their wages with members on the NFPS having an increase to around *11.5%*. Firefighters already pay some of the largest contributions in the UK and this massive increase would be financially crippling, especially at a time of ongoing pay freezes.

## **Raising retirement ages – Working Longer**

The Government believe that public sector pensions should (from 2015) have a normal retirement age which mirrors the state pension age. This will initially be 66 but will rise to 68 (this proposal hits members of the Local Government Pension Scheme).

The exemption to this is that uniformed workers will have a Normal Retirement Age (NRA) set at **age 60**. Members know that the NFPS already has a NRA of 60 while the FPS has a NRA of 55.

The "60" retirement age in the NFPS was introduced in 2006 based on the concept that sufficient non ops posts would be introduced following changes to the Role Maps; but as we all know, since 2006 the number of Firefighters posts has actually **fallen massively**.

The FBU has always had serious concerns about the 60 retirement age. We believe that operational fitness cannot be properly maintained over age 55 *in enough cases* to ensure an effective and efficient fire service in

the future. We have raised these concerns in numerous submissions to pension reviews. Based on this the Union has now taken a decision to campaign to achieve an NRA of 55 for NFPS members.

## **Scrapping final salary pensions - Get Less**

A main driver for the Government is to scrap final salary schemes (including the FPS and NFPS) and replace them with a career average scheme. This would be introduced as a part of the move to a new scheme in 2015 (stage 2). At this moment in time it is impossible to predict the real effects of this proposal because there is no firm information on the accrual rates or the revaluation factors that will be used. However the FBU is clear that all of these proposals are about cuts and this proposal must be judged in that context.

## **Hands off our pensions!**

The FBU knows how vital our pensions are to Members and we are vigorously opposing these detrimental changes. We have made 2 formal submissions and have had meetings with ministers. On every occasion we have made evidenced counter arguments to the proposals.

We have also launched a legal challenge to Government plans which change the way that pensions are uprated from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the lower Consumer Price Index (CPI). This change alone would potentially mean a reduction in future pension benefits of around 15%.

We have exposed and undermined Government claims that contribution increases would raise revenue. Our YouGov survey found one in four firefighters could leave the main FPS scheme if pension changes are pushed through. This exodus would strip the scheme of the cash it needs to pay current pensioners and create a £210 million shortfall for the taxpayer to pick up. (Cont page 3)

## **HANDS OFF OUR PENSIONS! - CONT FROM PAGE 2**

Far from making savings as the Government wants, the changes proposed would see additional costs for the taxpayer. It would also seriously undermine the entire scheme creating a situation where it costs the taxpayer more, costs firefighters more and delivers worse pensions - a no win scenario for everyone.

But despite all of our reasoned arguments the Government appears hell bent on forcing these plans through. Against this background the Union recently called an emergency national meeting of FBU Officials which concluded that *we must*



SW FBU Members at the pensions lobby in London

*prepare for national strike action.* This is not something that any of us want but we are being forced into this position by a Government forcing through the most serious pension attacks for a generation.

The Union is calling on *every Branch* to meet and discuss these vital issues. We want **you** to consider and **vote** on the national resolution (below) in order to inform our decision making. Your Brigade Officials will help you organise and keep you informed. It is vital that **all**

**Members** are engaged in this issue, its a fight which fundamentally affects us all.

### **FBU MODEL RESOLUTION FOR ALL UNION BRANCHES**

#### **DEFENDING SERVICES, JOBS, PAY AND PENSIONS**

This Branch applauds the success of the TUC demonstration on March 26 against cuts and austerity. We remain completely opposed to the huge cuts proposed for our Fire and Rescue Service and other public services as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. For the Fire and Rescue Service this cuts agenda will mean fewer firefighters and will undermine our ability to respond as quickly and effectively to emergencies or to engage professionally in protection or prevention work. This will inevitably increase risks to the public and to Firefighters. In the case of the Fire Service: CUTS COST LIVES.

This branch condemns:

- The national employers' refusal to make a pay offer for 2010 or 2011
- The cuts to fire cover
- Attacks on our shifts and conditions of service
- The attacks on public sector pension schemes including those in the fire service

#### **ATTACKS ON PENSIONS**

We note that there are currently three attacks on our pensions:

1. The change to indexation of pensions by the use of CPI instead of RPI
2. The proposed increase in contribution rates from April 2012 which is simply a raid on our pension schemes to raise money to pay off government debt
3. The scrapping of all existing schemes by 2015 and their replacement by new imposed schemes based on:
  - a) Removal of the final salary basis of our pensions
  - b) Introducing new (worse) accrual rates
  - c) Increasing retirement ages in the LGPS and FPS
  - d) Refusing a reduction in the normal retirement age for members of the NFPS
  - e) Introducing new and as yet unspecified employee contribution rates

We support the decision by the Executive Council to mount a legal challenge against the change from RPI to CPI and its position to mount a legal challenge against any aspect of these attacks where our lawyers advise there is a reasonable prospect of success. We commit to give financial and moral support to members of those unions who have already balloted to take industrial action starting with the coordinated strike on June 30.

This branch notes that despite efforts by the FBU, by other unions and by the TUC to negotiate on these issues, government Ministers are intent on forcing changes through without agreement.

This branch therefore supports:

1. The decision of FBU conference to prepare for national strike action.
2. A ballot for such action as soon as the Executive Council concludes this step is necessary.
3. Steps to coordinate such industrial action with other unions where appropriate.

## NO TO FRONTLINE CUTS



**South West EC Member  
Tam McFarlane**

**I know that every Firefighter & Emergency Fire Control Member in the South West will join with me in condemning the disgraceful attacks by the Government on all our pension schemes in the Fire and Rescue Service.**

On the 28th of April 2011 I wrote on your behalf to all Members of Parliament within the South West to express the anger and outrage felt by FBU Members within the Region regarding these unjust, unfair and shameful attacks on Fire Service pensions.

I wanted all our MP's to be in no doubt as to the anger felt by Firefighters & Control Staff across the Region regarding these attacks which include increasing contribution rates, raising retirement ages and scrapping the final salary scheme within our pension provision.

**In summary, these plans would mean Firefighters & Control Staff having to work longer, pay more and get less.**

FBU Members rightly believe these proposals to be totally unjust and see them as a further attack on our profession when we are already facing pay freezes and frontline cuts. The proposals totally ignore the points that Firefighters already pay up to 11% contributions and that Fire Service pensions underwent a major reform and "modernisation" only a few years ago.

There appears to be absolutely no recognition by the Government of the dangerous and physically demanding nature of a Firefighters role or the massive personal financial contribution that our Members make towards their pension.

Our pensions were reformed substantially as recently as 2006 and they are 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".

I informed MP's that 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. Despite this, the Government appears adamant that Firefighters hard earned pensions will be lost and our Members plans for the future will be destroyed.

Since that time and despite ongoing negotiations with the TUC, the Government has recently signalled that it intends to press ahead with its disgraceful attack on public sector pensions.

I know that everyone is increasingly alarmed and angered at the Government proposals and the FBU is committed to campaigning and fighting on our members behalf for pension justice. As part of this campaign I urge **all Members**, as a matter of urgency, to write to their own individual MPs expressing their personal concern and anger on this issue. Any change in our pensions will be agreed in Parliament and we must make every MP **accountable** for their actions. A "model" letter is available on the South West FBU website and South West FBU Facebook page for Members to use as a template if they wish. Your MP's details and address are easily available via the parliamentary website.

Lobbying MPs in this way is an important and necessary part of the campaigning process but the FBU is absolutely clear. If the Government will not budge, we must prepare for a serious fight – which would mean strike action. On this basis I urge every single branch to meet to discuss this issue and every single member to participate. The model resolution in this bulletin is part of a national decision making process and it is vital that your Branch considers and votes on this as part of our campaign.

Nobody in our profession takes the prospect of strike action lightly, but our pensions are a necessary part of our working lives which offer some protection and peace of mind to both ourselves and our families. We all need to join together to protect them from this gross injustice.

**Unity is Strength  
Tam McFarlane**

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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)



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK:

Follow us on our own dedicated facebook page: Go to **South West-Region of the Fire Brigades Union**, and hit the "like" button to receive updates on how we are fighting for you locally. Also follow us on our dedicated website at: [www.southwestfbu.com](http://www.southwestfbu.com)