

Coalition Breaks Promises on RCCs

The RCC fiasco continues with the Coalition Government failing to honour its commitment to scrap Regional Fire Controls. No real surprises there – Tories not doing what they say but the reality for FBU members in Control Rooms is that the threat to their jobs, their livelihoods and their families is as real now as it was before the election.

The ConDem Government made a statement on the 28th July stating it was to abolish a whole raft of Fire Service structures and targets, leaving decisions on Equality and Diversity and regional working to local politicians and managers. But on the subject of RCCs it was quiet.

The RCC project team in the South West are still working to the timetable set out last year where the first Control to cut over will do so in May 2011, this means that Somerset Control will close down in February 2011 to allow training to take place in the RCC. So we have 6 months to save our Fire Service. We cannot rely on MPs or CFOs to do this; this one is down to us. We have fought like tigers over the last 7 years and won the arguments in favour of local control rooms and despite this plans are still in place. We have said all along we can win this battle and it is the view of the Regional Officials that we still can

The Government has at its centre the “Big Society” where decisions are devolved down to the lowest possible level. Well, here in the South West it is impossible to find one person, with the exception of senior RCC people, who want RCCs, who see any benefit in RCC and who want to give up local control of their Fire and Rescue Service. Now that’s localism!

Your Union will be contacting all MPs again over the summer recess and reiterating our stance on why any move to a Regional Control Centre would be bad for our communities, bad for firefighters and bad for the professionals who work in Local Control Rooms - 51 of which are either Conservative or Liberal Democrats, the same politicians whose party manifestoes stated they would scrap RCCs. Ever feel like you have been duped?

But you can also play your part: Contact your local MP and ask them why they have broken their pledge on RCC? Ask them what they are doing to safeguard vital skills and professionalism in their FRS? Equally importantly tell them you and your friends and family will not forget this betrayal at the next election and your Union definitely wont.

The next few months are crucial in our fight to stop this and it is important we use the lobby of Parliament on the 17th November to maximum effect. Your local Brigade Officials will be organising transport to the House of Commons on that day and more details will be on the regional website www.southwestfbu.com. In addition, it is important that Control Room Branches are at the hub of any further campaigning and are asked to organise Branch meetings for early September to coordinate our activities during the Autumn.



IF YOU AREN'T ANGRY YOU ARE NOT PAYING ATTENTION

So, let's re-cap on the events of the last few years: New Labour de regulated the city financial institution that lead to a situation where a select few made vast fortunes by gambling with investments based on selling on risk again and again until the risks were massive and the bonds worthless, leaving the banks in dire peril and perversely those at the top of these institutions with massive bank accounts. So then the Governments of the "developed" world came to the collective view that it would not be right to let these banks and other financial monoliths go to the wall so they bailed them out with billions of pounds leaving a massive deficit between what UK Plc earns and what it spends. Fast forward a year or two and the collective view is now that the deficit is a "bad thing" and must be addressed as a matter of priority. So who do the Government say must pay for this deficit? The banks, bankers and financial leaders of the free world or the cleaners, teachers, nurses, firefighters and control room staff of our public services?

We have had the budget statement by George Osborne and this was a typical Conservative budget, tax breaks for the rich, pay cuts for the poor, welfare cuts for the vulnerable and public sector cuts for everybody. Well, is it for everybody? In the Cabinet there are 23 millionaires or multi millionaires who have taken a 5% pay cut, that's an easy thing to do when your bank balance has more noughts in it than a local telephone directory. We are all in this together says the Con Dem coalition. It certainly doesn't feel like it for a worker in the Public Sector. A 2 year pay cut, sorry, pay freeze but with inflation running at 5.1% we have had a 5.1% pay cut, higher than the Cabinet pay cut AND we aren't millionaires.

Our pensions or "Gold Plated Public Sector Pensions" as they are routinely described are also under attack. Remember this, when we all joined the Fire Service we signed a contract with our employer to join the FPS or NFPS or LGPS which states that in return for paying a percentage of your pay every month at a certain time in the future you will receive a monthly payment. Every single one of us has honoured our side of the contract, despite the unaffordability at certain times in our lives we continued to pay for our pension. Now that it is "unaffordable" for them, we have to accept that either our contributions have to rise or we have to accept reduced benefits. How is that fair?

Let's move onto cuts in public services, including the FRS. The public are being prepared by the Governments mates in the mainstream media to accept that there is no alternative to drastic reductions in public services - there are and this will be explained later but what will be the impact on the FRS? Station closures, job losses, reduction in the response to emergency incidents that is currently a post code lottery. This is coming and the FBU will oppose any reduction in front line services. But the big question for FBU members and the members of other unions is "Where is your line in the sand?"

If we accept a pay cut then is it draconian changes to our pensions? If we accept a pay cut and worsening of pension benefits are we ready to fight for jobs, pumps and stations? If we accept this then what is next? More privatisation, more Casualisation, more worsening of our hard won conditions of service? Be absolutely clear once these have gone they won't be coming back. So we must be prepared to fight and to fight hard against any proposals that make the workers pay for the bankers crisis. But it must be joined with other Unions and Community Groups, we cannot win on our own, we must have a united front.

The Government, Fire Authorities and CFO will argue that we have no alternative, the deficit is a "bad thing" and must be tackled head on by cutting public sector pay, pensions and services, but there is an alternative. Over £130 billion of uncollected tax is out there, hiding in the accounts of the super rich and major companies, investment in collecting these unpaid taxes will go a huge way to reducing the deficit. Cancelling Trident replacement will save an estimated £80 Billion and of course scrapping the RCC project, as they promised, will save a further £1.4 Billion. Over £200 Billion waiting to be pumped into the economy to reduce the deficit and give hard working public servants the pay rises they need to keep up with inflation, the pension they have paid for a dignified retirement and the public services they deserve. But, of course you won't read about this in the press or hear it on the news because the vested interests in the media want to protect their mates from paying tax. They want to maintain the lie that "we all have to take our share of the hit" and we are swallowing that lie.

The big question for all FBU members is "Are you willing to fight for what is right?"

Please can Branch Officials contact Kevin Herniman, Regional Official, with the details of any Branch Meetings planned in August/September.

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