

Don't let Blair break the FBU

Blair is determined to make an example of the firefighters.

His plans to use the army and police to go through the picket lines to take the red fire engines have come unstuck. Now he is threatening to create an army of civilian scabs to do this. He has also threatened to use the anti union laws to sack strikers, even to seize the assets of the FBU.

If the FBU is defeated it will be a defeat for every trade unionist. It will allow the government to continue to hold down wages and introduce cutbacks and privatisation throughout the public service. This is why every trade unionist, everyone in the working class communities who rely on decent public service, should stand behind the firefighters.

How can the strike be won? What you can do to help?

- Visit the picket lines and show your support. Toot your horns when passing.
- Striking firefighters get no strike pay – they will only get hardship handouts. They urgently need money if they are to maintain the strike. Trade unionists should immediately organise weekly collections in workplaces – bring firefighters from your local station to come and help. Regular collections should also be held in the communities.

Donations can be paid to: Region 2 Fire Brigade Hardship Fund, Northern Bank, Sort Code: 95-03-61. Account number: 11242822. Send the lodgement slips to: The Fire Brigades Union, 11 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn BT28 1XJ

- Refuse to work under unsafe conditions - Tube workers in London have refused to run the tubes during the fire strike because the lack of fire cover endangers both the workforce and the travelling public. Other workers should do the same.
- If Blair goes further and sacks any strikers or tries to seize the assets of the FBU this is an attack on the whole trade union movement and other workers should respond by taking solidarity action. If the union leaderships do not make the call for such action it should be made by the FBU and taken up by shop stewards and activists in every union.

Support the Richardson's workers!

Richardsons workers who have been made redundant have been diddled out of pension rights and other entitlements by their employer. The Irish government owns the company along with ICI. The workers have had no choice but to occupy their plant until they are guaranteed the money they are owed. They are supported by the FBU locally. These two struggles should be linked with a single solidarity campaign to give them public backing.

Break the link with Labour

Never mind Saddam Hussein, Tony Blair has declared war on the trade union movement. Yet a majority of unions, the FBU included, are still affiliated to New Labour. It is now clear that New Labour is a bosses party and that this government is a Thatcherite Tory government under another name.

It is time for the unions to break with Blair and disaffiliate from New Labour. The funds that are now used to prop up Blair should instead be used to build a new working class party to oppose him.

Socialist Party – a voice for working people

The Socialist Party has been involved in workers struggles for many years. In the unions the Socialist Party has led many successful disputes. We have also consistently campaigned to change the unions into fighting democratic organisations. Our End Low Pay Campaign has won many victories for low paid workers. We are also launching a major campaign against privatisation this year.

We believe working class people need an independent political voice. In Northern Ireland, it is an urgent task to build a working class party which unites workers against the right-wing policies of the Assembly. In the South, our TD Joe Higgins is the only socialist in the Dail.

If you would like to join the Socialist Party or would like to find out more fill in the form below.

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—**Socialist Party**—

Stand by the Firefighters!



Firefighters have been forced into the current strike by the intervention of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The government intervened in the negotiations to limit the offer to 4% this year. Anything above that was to be conditional on completely unacceptable strings. This was a deliberate provocation that left the FBU with no option but to go ahead with the 8 day strike.

What is the strike about?

For firefighters the dispute is about achieving a decent pay rise that takes account of the highly skilled and dangerous work they do. Last June the employers offered 16%. The government intervened to take the offer off the table and then lied claiming it was never made.

The FBU have made clear that 16% would be a good starting point for negotiations, provided there were no unacceptable strings. This is a very reasonable position. Remember firefighters don't work overtime and don't receive shift or unsocial hours allowances.

For the government the strike is about breaking the FBU which Blair has called a Scargellite union. It is not about "modernising" or "improving" the fire service as they have claimed.

Modernisation?

The proposals put forward by the Bain Report and now by Blair are not "reforms", they are counter reforms. They say they want to cut costs, but even some of the employers admit that the only way this can be done is by cutting jobs.

They are demanding less crews on fire engines at night. Yes, this would save money but it would cost lives.

They are demanding that firefighters work overtime on top of their 42 hour week, and also that they volunteer to be part time firefighters in their days off. This also would save money but would cost jobs and lead to exhausted crews fighting fires.

In the longer run the government would like to sell off parts of the service to private companies as they have done with the railways and are doing with the post office. This would

mean a drastic decline in standards and in safety.

By "modernisation" Tony Blair does not mean going forward into the 21st century, he means the imposition of wages and conditions that would not have been out of place in the 19th century.

It is the FBU who have come forward with real suggestions to modernise and improve the service – separate sleeping arrangements for women, made to fit uniforms to give greater safety etc. These are necessary changes and the government should be prepared to put up the money to implement them.

The firefighters are not fighting just for themselves. They are fighting for the best possible service for the public and to make sure that government cuts dressed up as "reforms" are not implemented.