

# Siren

## Inside this issue

- ... Women's TUC page 2
- ... National school page 6
- ... Kate Ellis page 8

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Women Members [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk)

Summer 2010



**LIFT OTHERS WITH  
YOU AS YOU RISE**

**Inspiring messages from women's school**

**page 6**



## 4 Working together to improve things ...

Reports from this year's FBU women's school

## 7 Unexpected but positive

How a motion moved by the National Women's Committee at FBU national conference had an influence beyond the FBU



## 8 A brave woman

How Kate Ellis fought seven years of discrimination with help from the FBU

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Amanda Cregin, Northumberland brigade chair, reports from this year's Women's TUC

# 'An inspiration to women everywhere'

I had the pleasure of being invited to the TUC's women's conference in March this year with the FBU women's committee.

What made this year's conference extra special was it was also the 100th anniversary of international women's day – a celebration of the political, social, and economic achievements of women and the continuous campaigning for women's rights.

While we looked back over history and celebrated these amazing successes we saw from the resolutions put forward at this year's conference that campaigning for women's rights is far from over.

One of the main topics that ran through the conference was public sector cuts which all of the major political parties had promised with the general election looming.

We heard about a TUC report that shows these cuts would hit female employment the hardest as four in 10 women work in the public sector compared to less than two in 10 men. Women view the public sector as offering secure work with a good work-life balance and a decent

retirement income – all of which would be removed or reduced by deep public sector cuts.

Resolutions put forward by the FBU included motions on domestic abuse and Afghanistan. The motion on domestic abuse was moved by Jo Byrne and highlighted the lack of adequately funded support services available to women suffering domestic abuse and showed there is an unacceptable postcode lottery of services.

Vicky Knight moved the motion on women in Afghanistan, raising

**Cuts would hit female employment hardest as four in 10 women work in the public sector compared to less than two in 10 men**

the dangers for women eight years after the supposed fall of the Taliban and highlighting the need for us as individuals and as unions, to lobby the UK government to put pressure on its Afghan peers to ensure equal opportunities within Afghan society and public life.



# Women's TUC



FBU delegates at the Women's TUC



PICTURES: JANINA STRUK

Along with the motions highlighting women's struggles today there were, as always, inspirational stories – from women who had been victims of attacks by extreme right organisations like BNP and Redwatch and who spoke out instead of living in fear – to international speakers such as Joyce Moloji Moropa MP, chair of the South African parliament's public service and administration committee.

Joyce spoke of her continuous involvement in politics, remembering her early involvement in the ANC youth wing and the impatience felt by younger activists about the need for change. Joyce was very frank about how women who had been discriminated against by apartheid suffered additional gender discrimination – particularly as working women, with the double burden of paid and domestic labour.

Joyce has been actively involved in building a women's organisation in the ANC and South African society, a project that means that within South African political structures women's representation reaches up to 50%.

This figure shows that, 20 years after the apartheid state was dismantled, our sisters in South Africa have something to teach us, as this infiltration into the political system at all levels is an amazing achievement.

The conference ended with a farewell to Professor Mary Davis the chair of this year's conference who, after an amazing opening speech on the importance of the continuous organisation of women and their fight for equality, sadly announced that she is stepping down from the women's TUC committee. A history lecturer, author and well known socialist and feminist, she has been, and will continue to be an inspiration to women everywhere.

Thank you, Mary.

The FBU  
delegation at the  
Women's TUC

# Editors' letter



**Sisters,**

**T**his summer edition of *Siren* comes to you following a momentous quarter for all members – a busy springtime of conferences, events, international women's day, brigade, regional and national FBU women's meetings and activities.

In the general election, members and officials fought hard to keep the BNP out (and we did!) and a Labour government in power – on which we were not so successful.

We have also had an FBU general secretary election and National Women's Committee (NWC) congratulations go to Brother Matt Wrack who has been re-elected to serve for a further five-year period. The NWC look forward to continuing our good work with his support and assistance.

The 2010 annual FBU women's school in April – our flagship women's event had rave reviews from the 60 attendees as an inspirational, uplifting and educational event, which FBU women want to see return year after year. Thanks must go to the committee for all their hard work in planning and organising and the participants who gave so much over the three days.

A demand for an increase in awareness of and a visual commitment to equality and diversity was voiced by those at the school and within the motions from the NWC to FBU annual conference, held in Southport this year (19-21 May).

The three NWC motions debated by conference can be found in the conference agenda on branches and the NWC website at [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk) and are centred around fire and rescue uniform, menopause and domestic violence – all issues repeatedly raised by women throughout the year.

The NWC are finalising details of two new documents on menopause and domestic violence, which we hope to see produced in the coming months and we also hope to be in a position to report positively on the ongoing NJC negotiations regarding maternity, paternity and adoption provisions very soon.

Enjoy this bumper edition and hope to see you at schools, meetings and marches in the coming months!!

**Vicky Knight, Executive Council member, Women's TUC**  
**Kerry Baigent, Secretary, National Women's Committee**

**P.S.** The national education programme is available to all members via local reps and officials. Remember, FBU education is free to all members, childcare is provided and early applications are welcomed to avoid disappointment. For any assistance or advice, contact details of your local officials are on the back page.

# 'Working together

Sixty women from all over the UK were at this year's FBU women's school at Wortley Hall near Sheffield on 9 to 11 April. The reviews were fantastic. As usual, we will feed all the reviews and feedback into next year's school. The school's main theme was campaigning against the far right but, as always, students could choose from a number of workshops.

## 'It's about reaching down and lifting other women up'

I'm now beginning my tenth year of service and couldn't let another year pass without attending my first women's school.

I looked at Gloria Mills MBE, CBE (right), sitting unassumingly at the table and wondered who she was and what she was going to talk about.

When Gloria stood up and began to recount her union beginnings while working in legal publishing, my ears tuned in to example after example of her tenacity and courage.

She spoke of how she became the first "mother of the chapel" in her print union and quickly led a mainly female committee, better able to represent the hitherto silent voices of their 57% women majority.

Since then, Gloria has served in many important roles, including president of the TUC, campaigning tirelessly to bring hugely significant changes in the field of equality.

It is not surprising she achieved this as, when asked if she'd ever thought of giving up in the early days, she replied with a resounding: "Not once!"

I sit and think of the countless negotiation meetings Gloria must have been in and it makes my current journey to seek flexible working in today's fire service seem surmountable by comparison. I am encouraged

further by her observations:

"Do not be (women) used against each other. Lift others with you as you rise... NEVER take comfort being the only woman in the room, that's failure. The door must be open for every woman and you can make that happen..."

"Be mobilised (I get that one!), be galvanised (by working together to protect our interests) and be organised to be recognised!"

Wow, a whole heap of advice and looking around that room I see the nucleus of this is already here, evident in the difficult, time-consuming but hugely valuable work with measurable benefits done by the women's' executive committee and reps.

But there is still much to be done, by more courageous women, collectively working together to improve things, be it locally or nationally.

"I don't have any problems, why would I need to get involved with all that?" is often heard. Well, we are reminded every day in the workplace

**Asked if she'd ever thought of giving up, she replied with a resounding: 'Not once!'**



that we are different, be it by working in gloves that are too big, a look of surprise from a member of the public when we drive the lorry or being called "gent" for the third time that tour. Let's not be ashamed or apologise, let's be proud that we are different and will never be the same as many of our colleagues.

So it's about reaching down and lifting other women up, reaching up for help and most importantly as I see it – reaching out to support one another in our unique position. It is not bad-mouthing each other or joining in with games that divide us and weaken our position.

We have influence, we can have power, but we can only achieve this and make real changes by working together, following Gloria's advice.

So when I think of Gloria and all she has achieved, my pet complaint of ill-fitting workwear trousers begs to be resolved as an achievable task. "Impossible!" I hear you shout.

**Ruth Douglas, Royal Berkshire**



# to improve things'



PICTURES: JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

## Yorkshire Hope Not Hate: Rising to the challenge

**A**t this year's school we focused on tackling the far right with the general election due on 6 May. Matt Wrack opened the morning up with his session on campaigning against the far right and why the FBU should get involved in such campaigns.

Lorraine Fitzsimmons took time out of her busy schedule as one of two campaign organisers within the Yorkshire region to attend our school and briefly talk to us about her work and what we can do to help.

Tackling the far right, and in particular the BNP, is never an easy task. They use underhand methods and tactics to persuade people that voting for them is the answer to immigration problems and the ongoing economic crisis, when really they are about inciting racial hatred.

As some of you may already know this is not where they stop in their bigoted views. Women are also a target for their vile filth. With quotes from BNP officials like "rape is no worse than force feeding a woman chocolate cake, women like chocolate" are just the tip of the iceberg of their views on women.

Voter apathy allows parties like the BNP to gain votes and so power. That is why we as trade union members must rise to the challenge and help where we can to persuade people to use their vote wisely. They must not be put off voting for a credible party and waste their vote that shapes all of our futures.

It is simple and easy to help keep these parties out of power, where many people have fought so hard for our rights. We can do nothing or something, the school chose something. We all went away promising to challenge and help where we can!

For further information on how you can help visit the Hope Not Hate website [www.hopenothate.com](http://www.hopenothate.com) and *Searchlight* magazine [www.searchlightmagazine.com](http://www.searchlightmagazine.com)

**Sam Rye, region 3 women's rep**

**We can do nothing or something,  
the school chose something.  
We all went away promising to  
challenge and help where we can!**



### 'BEING A REP' WORKSHOP HAS PROVIDED ME WITH SO MUCH USEFUL INFORMATION

I attended my first women's school in 2009 and became inspired by the hard work that women do within their brigades.

On return to station I approached the union rep and told him what a great weekend I had and that I would be happy to get more involved and to help out with anything.

A year later I'm brigade women's rep, brigade and women's committee health and safety rep and vice chair of the Scottish women's committee. As I am still very new to it all, I chose the 'being a rep' workshop to obtain more information and new skills to be the best rep I can for members.

The workshop began with the discussion on what FBU reps do and the skills they

should possess to do their job well. I received information on the legal rights for reps, legislation and the problem information plan (PIP).

The workshop concluded with participants using their knowledge to deal with a workplace issue. We did this working in small groups and reported back to the rest of the class on our approach to the problem.

The workshop was set in a very friendly atmosphere and the tutor really knew her stuff. I found this extremely beneficial as it's provided me with so much useful information to assist me in my role as a rep.

**Kerry Walker,  
Dumfries and Galloway women's rep**

# Negotiating gender: a challenging but enlightening debate

**O**ver the years, I've been one of the women asking for a workshop that was a bit more challenging, something to create a debate and stimulate the old grey cells. Jo Winrow-Jones obliged by providing some of the findings from her recently acquired MA in women's studies.

The session started with Jo explaining how she became interested in the subject; what hard graft it had been; and how satisfying the results are.

She gave us a potted history of the gender debate and the students discussed their understanding of the term "gender". This made sure we

had a basic understanding before we moved on to relate some gender theories to our workplace experiences and society in general.

Jo managed to make what could be seen as a "heavy session" into a really useful workshop which students obviously enjoyed and were able to take away some important points.

I had a great time chairing the session and, as an observer, I could see that the students who engaged in the debate left with a better understanding of gender and its impact upon them.

Thanks Jo – a challenging but enlightening debate!

**Helen Harrison,**  
*region 7 women's rep*

## 'The day I told my line manager I was pregnant it became apparent how different we really are'

**I** have been a member of the union for eight years and only became actively involved after falling pregnant with my son Jack in 2008.

This was my first women's school and I can't believe it has taken me this long to attend. I guess, like many others, I was of the opinion that, "I just wanted to fit in with the lads" and "I'm not different, so why make a fuss".

However the day I told my line manager I was pregnant it became apparent how different we really are.

For that reason I chose to do the maternity workshop, facilitated by Sohagi Patel from Thompsons solicitors.

Each pregnancy appears to be addressed differently throughout the whole of the fire and rescue service. This may be due to lack of knowledge by management or individuals not being aware of their entitlement.

On completion of the session I now have the confidence to advise any women members what they are entitled to from the Grey book conditions and by law, as well as approaching management with

some of the best practice maternity document content.

Not only that, I can also inform some of our male members about the additional paternity leave that comes into effect in April 2011, which allows fathers an additional six months paternity leave providing the mother has returned to work.

Overall a very enjoyable and educational weekend, I'm already looking forward to the next one and I think Jack is too.

**Natalie Mortimer,**  
*Tyne and Wear women's rep*



## EVERYONE IS SO FRIENDLY

My mum is an FBU women's rep and that means she attends the women's school at Wortley Hall in the spring time. The good thing about this is that because my dad is at work we get to go with her!

We attend the fabulous crèche run by Jane and her team. The crèche is where we get looked after while my mum goes for meetings with other FBU women members.

There are other children that go to the crèche which is brilliant as it means I get to meet other children from around the country. At the crèche we do lots of exciting things like arts and crafts, outdoor games, walks in the woods and bouncing around on a huge inflatable castle. On the Saturday night we get to go to the disco for a while and this is where we get prizes for the activities we have taken part in!

The main reason I like going to Wortley though is because everyone is so friendly from the staff to the crèche workers and all the other children.

I hope to go next year so maybe I'll be seeing you there too!

**Hannah Rye**

# Unexpected but positive

## NWC motion to FBU annual conference 2009 – human trafficking

Annual conference condemns the appalling and unacceptable escalation of human trafficking, which predominantly targets women and children.

Internationally, human trafficking is the fastest growing organised crime, with around two million people being forced into the sex trade every year. This is nothing short of 21st century slavery and must be wiped out.

Therefore this conference calls upon the executive council to:

- ... Campaign within the TUC and sister unions to seek adequate government resources to prevent and deter the perpetrators, and to provide support and refuge for the victims.
- ... Publicise and oppose this form of exploitation and abuse.
- ... Work closely with organisations such as Amnesty International and other relevant agencies to highlight to eradicate this slavery.

A motion moved by the National Women's Committee at FBU national conference had an unexpected but positive outcome

**W**hen Bristol city council set up a commission to improve community cohesion and safety, it needed ideas on the issues it should address.

Retired firefighter Jeff Lovell, a Labour Party councillor, was a member of the commission. He suggested that it should tackle human trafficking.

Jeff had attended FBU annual conference 2009 as a visitor and was inspired by the National Women's Committee (NWC) motion on human trafficking moved by Jo Byrne.

Having raised the issue with the commission, Jeff then made the case for achieving a better understanding of this evil trade and it was agreed to organise an "inquiry day" that looked at ways of combating human trafficking.

Many organisations were invited, some from as far afield as Ireland, and the event was an eye-opener for many.

The end result was recognition that



Demonstration against human trafficking in London earlier this year



Jo Byrne: moved motion on human trafficking

the council should be doing better.

A report to go to the full city council was prepared that set out the findings of the inquiry day. It recommended training for council staff, allocation of funding and accommodation to help deal with the problem and examination of ways for people in the council and voluntary sector to work together more effectively.

Jeff spoke in support of the report at the full council.

This shows how a motion moved by the NWC at annual conference can have a positive impact. A big thank you goes to Jeff Lovell and Bristol city council for their progressive stance on this very important issue.

## CONGRATULATIONS ...

... to Vicky Knight on her re-election for a third term as the executive council member for women. She was unopposed and nominated by 36 brigade committees.

... to Sam Rye who has been re-elected to the Northern TUC. Sam is the region 3 women's rep and assistant secretary to the national women's committee.

... to Jo Byrne who has been elected by the Welsh TUC to serve on the Welsh TUC women's committee. Jo Byrne is the region 8 women's rep.

... to Tamsin Walkowiak (Hereford and Worcester women's rep) and Emma Davis (region 9 women's rep) on the births of their baby boys Michael and Oliver.



## KATE ELLIS

A woman firefighter who was sexually harassed in the workplace for more than six years has secured a settlement at her employment tribunal. Kate Ellis suffered sex discrimination, bullying and harassment, sexual harassment and constructive dismissal while working as a firefighter for Hampshire fire and rescue service from 2003 and 2008.

Kate said: "This settlement culminates more than seven years of hell. I'm finally relieved that I can start to put this behind me."

"The victimisation left me feeling very disappointed with a service I once held in high esteem. I had always wanted to be a member of the fire service and finally achieved that dream

**'Hopefully her bravery will lead to Hampshire fire and rescue service having a close look at its equal opportunities protocols'**

after a lot of hard work and sacrifice.

"When I approached the fire service with my concerns they were never taken seriously, and the management then launched an unfounded disciplinary against me because I had raised my concerns."

She went on: "At first I tried to rationalise the way I was treated as I knew I was a female working in a male environment, but it soon became obvious that I was being singled out. I've since discovered this is a problem faced by many female firefighters and I feel strongly that more needs to be done to address this."

Over the six years she worked at Kingsclere fire station she was subjected to 42 incidents of sexual harassment, her car was vandalised

and she was verbally abused by the wife of a firefighter in the street. Her watch manager prevented her from driving the fire engine, despite her qualifying as an advanced driver.

Her treatment was so bad she ended up leaving the role after waiting for a chance for more than 20 years to join the service.

In closing the case, the judge, John Warren, told the fire service: "I hope that every case should have a wider consequence than just resolving the dispute. I hope that this can be a lesson to the respondents and I hope something will be learned from this. Hopefully some procedures will be put in place to make sure this conduct does not occur again."

Hampshire fire and rescue service settled her claim for an undisclosed sum after two days of an employment tribunal hearing scheduled to last for 12. The service had to make a full admission of liability for all charges. She was supported by the FBU and its lawyers Thompsons solicitors.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "Kate Ellis was subjected to systematic abuse over a two-year period which subsequently ended up in her leaving the service which she had worked so hard to join. The FBU works hard to promote equal rights in the work place. This case shows how much more work needs to be done in some fire services where narrow-minded thinking is the norm."

James Lenihan from Thompsons solicitors added: "Mrs Ellis has shown that those facing discrimination in the workplace should not fear speaking up. Hopefully her bravery will lead to Hampshire fire and rescue service having a close look at its equal opportunities protocols."

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