



Siren



**Summer 2006
Women's School Special**

PENSIONS:
Your questions answered

ABORTION RIGHTS:
A women's right to choose



Vicky Knight

A magazine for women members

Siren has two new editors, Kerry Baigent and Vicky Knight.

We would like to start off by thanking Janette Ferguson (Scottish Region) for all her hard work over many years as editor of Siren, Jinty ... you did us proud, thank you.

This edition of *Siren* is an exciting one for us as it follows our annual Womens School held at Wortley Hall in Sheffield. The school was absolutely fantastic and we hope that we can share some of our school experiences with you through the pages of *Siren*.

Siren is a great tool for women members to use to share the many varied experiences that we are having in the UK fire service, so it was really great for us to have some letters to include inside this edition. We

really want you to e-mail letters or articles to us so that *Siren* stays as the women members' magazine and is not just written and read by officials!

Thanks and we hope you enjoy this edition.

Kerry and Vicky

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'Women ask for what you want ... and be prepared to get it'
 Maya Angelou

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Emma Carr region 9 women's rep (second right) is organising station visits on strike days

SUPPORT HERTFORDSHIRE MEMBERS. TOGETHER WE WILL STAND UNITED AND WIN!

On 2 March 2006 our brave FBU sisters and brothers in Hertfordshire produced a terrific 85.4% yes vote to take part in discontinuous strike action over plans to cut emergency response firefighter posts and close two fire stations in Hertfordshire.

Almost all of the cuts would fall in the highest risk area of the county and on the stations which were the first to respond to the Buncefield fire.

At the time of writing the FBU members in Hertfordshire held three highly successful strikes on May 20, May 26 and May 31. Faced with the determination of the fire authority to push ahead with the cuts, which are to include the closure of Radlett and Bovingdon fire stations. On 8 June, after a series of employer proposals that were

changed from the original cuts plan, the Union announced a 48-hour strike starting at 18.00 on Thursday 15 June and ending at 18.00 on Saturday 17 June. Hertfordshire fire crews have also called for face to face talks with the group leaders of the three political parties in a bid to settle their dispute.

The strength and unity that our members are showing in Hertfordshire is tremendous and all members must play a massive part in supporting them.

This support must not be just financial but physical support is crucial in ensuring that our members know we are there and they are not isolated in their fight. These cuts are a symbol of everything that is wrong in the UK Fire Service at the moment and we have to change the tide.

Ben Read, Hertfordshire Brigade Chair

has sent the following message to all members:

"I would like to thank everybody for their pledges of financial support. All donations should be paid into the following account at any branch of HSBC Bank"

Name of Account: Herts Fire Dispute Hardship Fund
 Account number: 41389041
 Sort Code: 40-39-22

Every member in every workplace is encouraged to pay into an organised weekly collection for the Hertfordshire Hardship Fund. If your branch isn't holding a collection, then please organise it yourself!

■ Emma Carr is the region 9 (East Anglia) Womens Representative and is organising station visits on strike days. Please contact her at emma.carr@fbu.org.uk for details.

PARTICIPATION

Our union has experienced many changes in the last few years. Many have been welcomed by members. Other changes have not been met with so much gusto. However, one event in the union calendar has thankfully been repeated for many years (in fact our 'formal' 10 year anniversary is next year) and has proved one of the most successful events held for our members: The Annual FBU Women's School.

When I joined the Fire Service in Merseyside in 1992 a support and information network for me as a young woman in such a male dominated industry was thin on the ground. There was only one other woman firefighter in the brigade. She became my saviour, my confidante, my supporter and my mentor. I was one of the lucky ones, there was someone to help me.

The feedback from sessions as ever was hugely positive, questions were forthcoming on every issue and the participation of students in the workshops was invaluable

At women's schools over the years I have met many sisters who have not enjoyed such a luxury. The devastating reality for many has been that as a woman in the Service 'fight or flight' are the only options and frankly they are just sick of fighting.

Today, 14 years on and many fire calls and FBU meetings later, as Executive Council member for Women I have been asked to write an article for Siren about our school. I welcome it. As a woman, still 'fighting' there doesn't always appear to be much to boast about but on the topic of our School and the resilience, power and unity of FBU Women I could go on for ever...

The school

April 7 2006. The FBU sisterhood descended upon Wortley Hall, Sheffield. 50 plus students, some with their children, speakers, tutors, international guests, the National Women's Committee and again representing Head Office, President Sister Ruth Winters.

The theme of the school was 'Women, Past and Present'. Our agenda, following the events

of the recent past was to return to our structures, take stock and organise for our future as a democratically representative section of the Union. It meant organising and campaigning for the things that women really need and want, internally via our structures, externally in society and in fire and rescue services (FRS) for women at work.

Our school is an opportunity for our regional representatives to work with women in their regions, hear ideas, listen to and work to resolve problems and ultimately, organise and prioritise the agenda for the year's tasks on their behalf. Also, it is crucial for them, myself and the NWC executive to hear from our most important resource, our members on the one occasion in the year when they are a collective.

Sessions at this year's event covered issues from the Union's structures and how they work, to Women, Class and Oppression, Pensions, Bullying and Harassment, Abortion Rights, the challenges we face as a Union and the organisation of women in unions and in society in Kurdistan. A broad agenda by anyone's standards!

Women have a plethora of ways to overcome oppression, gender stereotyping and discrimination and some of the best examples are from other countries. With shared practices via our global network of sisters and supporting trade unionists in struggle, our international links must never be undervalued or ignored. Wonderful, inspirational women are everywhere! International issues have always been close to the hearts of FBU Women. The international agenda is priceless in working towards our aims of a fairer society. Hi-lighting the progress and regress of women in societies worldwide is an invaluable opportunity to broaden our solidarity links.

Following some inspired input from sister Professor Mary Davis who tutored our members on women's history and the class struggle, our women were armed with the knowledge of the past in order to face the challenges of the future. They set their agendas and work towards organising at all levels of the union. Of the principles of our National Committee, unity, collective responsibility and the vital component of good lines of communication at ALL levels are paramount. Also, in moving forward with our agenda, women noted the importance of ALL members getting involved and pledges were given (and recorded sisters!) as to what

they can and will do in order to organise and maximise the impact of women within our trade union for the future.

The feedback from sessions as ever was hugely positive, questions were forthcoming on every issue and the participation of students in the workshops was invaluable. The crèche, once again this year, was a fabulous facility which really facilitates and encourages the attendance and participation. I doubt if our success would be so great without it. One of the agenda items for the NWC for the forthcoming year is to ensure that childcare is available to all who wish to attend trade union events, not just within our own union, but also the TUC. This agenda will help to eradicate childcare as a barrier to women's involvement in the wider movement.

To all the women out there who have never attended our school, I make a plea. Please

To all the women out there who have never attended our school, I make a plea. Please come and find out for yourselves how this event works, what we can offer you and how you can get involved. Our union can only be strengthened by the active participation of ALL members.

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The last few years have been difficult for ALL, yet we are here, united as women, bigger, stronger and more organised than ever before. Sisters, you have a National Committee who work tirelessly all year round representing women in brigades and regions, negotiating with FRSs on behalf of women, on behalf of you. Attend your meetings and make sure they know what you want.

I have recently been re-elected to the position of EC member for Women. Many thanks for all those that entrusted me with that position. I intend to continue supporting and expanding our committee in their work

IS THE KEY



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Women past and present: Fighting cuts in Derby in February 1995

and represent women to the best of my ability, ensuring that our issues never fall from any agenda.

As members of a union, we are all responsible for what the FBU do. We are also all responsible for what we do not do as members. As a union we are only as good as the members we represent. So use your voice, have your say and get involved. Whether it's by attending your branch, brigade women's meeting, regional women's meetings or our annual women's school, get involved.

The President outlined the battles that lay ahead for us as a union during her 'FBU overview' session. We have ongoing campaigns on regionalisation of fire controls, work still

Sessions covered issues from the Union's structures and how they work, to Women, Class and Oppression, Pensions, Bullying and Harassment and Abortion Rights

to do on pensions, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to conclude, attacks on our duty shift systems and fire cover as well as local disputes and strike action ongoing in many areas of the union. Sister Ruth's main

objective was a united response to these issues, a united union and a more stable future for all our members. We can only be divided when cracks appear.

So again, many thanks to all who attended for making the school the huge success it was, thanks to the committee for their help and support in running the event so smoothly and all the guests and tutors for their input. Last but not least, thanks to our president Ruth Winters for again addressing the school, being a truly inspirational woman, a fantastic President and credit to this trade union.

Vicky Knight
EC member for Women

Ring our free confidential stress and support hotline 0800 783 4778

I felt inspired

Every year the letter came through inviting me to attend the Women's School up in Sheffield. Every year I filed it in the bin. I didn't want to go. It wasn't something to which I gave a great deal of thought – I just thought that that sort of thing wasn't for me. I was fine and didn't need to spend a week-end away with a lot of militant women with whom I had nothing in common. I also wanted to fit in at work and not even look as though I was going to be difficult. I wasn't a troublemaker. I wanted acceptance.

However all that changed when I met Helen Harrison (Region 7's Women's Rep) at a pensions meeting. Her positive reaction to the Women's School was infectious and when I received the invitation to this year's Women's School I decided to give it a go.

It was an extremely enjoyable weekend. Not only did I learn a great deal from the

I can't wait to go next year. It's fun and you have everything to gain from the experience.

various lectures and workshops but also from the other women I was fortunate enough to meet. I identified with so much they said and as a result felt less isolated.

Returning to station I have felt inspired to stand up for things I would have avoided dealing with in the past and inspired to stand up for my fellow female colleagues. This has led to me taking on the role of station union rep and helping to set up a women's committee in the hope that we can begin tackling some of the issues we have encountered at work.

I can't wait to go next year and would urge anyone who has not been yet to give it a try. It's fun and you have everything to gain from the experience and nothing to lose. Just don't file that invite in the bin!

Kate Baer, Bromsgrove Fire Station, Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service

Women have a voice

I would like to thank all the NWC for another fantastic Women's School at Wortley Hall in April this year.

As one of the 'Older' ones, as I am regularly referred to during these weekends, I am genuinely impressed at how these schools improve with age. (Obviously, just like me. Ha, Ha!)

Each year, the schools format changes



to meet the needs of those that attend. 'Old' (see what I mean?) and new.

In previous years I have felt that some of the sessions have been quite tight for time, and I was rushing from one workshop to another. Especially if there were children to drop off or pick up in between times.

However, this year I even had time to

I met new women who were encouraged, inspired or empowered to get involved and help to make a difference. I felt re-charged

visit the stalls and spend lots of money. Particularly at the candle stall. Which Jane, who runs the crèche had set up to raise money for the Tsunami. (How did she manage to run the stall and the crèche, stay sane and keep a smile on her face?)

Talking about the crèche! What a

wonderful facility. The crèche workers work tirelessly for three days and two nights.

The children love it. I love it too! My eldest daughter, who is five, is already asking me when she can go back to 'The Big House', as she calls it. Not only do the women treat the weekend as an annual reunion, the children do to.

The school is always an extremely positive experience. However, I must say that it still frustrates me that women still appear to be getting a raw deal within the fire service. The good thing is that there is a huge network of women that have, in a lot of cases experienced this imbalance of fairness and are now there as back up and support for those that may need it.

If only I could borrow Mary Davies, for those 'round the mess table moments'. When I hear, 'Why do you need a women's group, the men haven't got one?'

How much would you charge Mary? You would be worth every penny. You never know you may find that dream man in a fire



Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition

Timothy Leary

women to come along and give it a try. I don't find I have to work so hard to get members who have already been, to come back!

The build up to the school has been hard work sometimes, but it wasn't this year, it just fell into place. This is a reflection of how far we have come as a committee. We are well organised and so running a school for 50 students isn't the huge effort it was when we started out. Most of this is down to Kerry (NWC Sec) who is a brilliant organiser and

Returning to station I have felt inspired to stand up for things I would have avoided dealing with in the past. I am now the union rep

who divides up the work and keeps us (and so the school) on track in the weeks leading up to the event. We have of course learned from previous years and don't waste time repeating mistakes. It's a slick operation now.

To me the school is really important to the committee as it is a focus for us and one of the few times we see large numbers of women members all together. It is also a great opportunity to encourage women to get involved in the work that the committee are engaged in. This isn't a narrow minded view. We aren't only trying to involve women in NWC, it follows that when women get involved they become active in the FBU as a whole. I see this, getting women involved, as a key element of our "raison d'être". All members of this union should be and are working to increase our capacity. We can only do this with more people becoming active.

This school gave me a much needed boost. I met new women who were encouraged, inspired or empowered to get involved and help to make a difference. I felt re-charged because, after a period of time when I felt that however hard I worked, nothing really improved, here were women saying they wanted to help! In order for the committee to stay strong, continue to grow and to keep on making a difference we need new hearts and minds!

Helen Harrison R7 rep

fighters uniform. (Dream on!)

A strong message that came up again and again throughout the weekend was that 'Women have a voice'. It is down to us to save it, as well as having it heard! It is our responsibility to make sure the sections in the union are not eradicated. It is also down to us to educate the men as to why the groups

The build up has been hard work sometimes, but this year it fell into place. This is a reflection of how far we have come as a committee

exist and why they are necessary.

Each and every workshop is planned to perfection. They are always extremely useful and always give you food for thought. Perhaps next year us 'Old' ones could have a session on the wonders of Botox, or some similar age defying treatment.

Or, in all seriousness. Seeing as a few of us are getting on a bit, perhaps a workshop on 'Menopause', may be of use. (Am I really that old?)

I hope you all have a good year, and for those that attended the women's school and enjoyed it. Spread the word and bring a friend next year. With a bit of luck there will be more success stories and less sad ones.

Karen Pagan, London Fire Brigade, Blue Watch Holloway, Crew Manager

P.S For those that didn't get round to asking me. My sister Jacqui and her son Alex were not at this year's school as they were sunning themselves in France.

High point of the year

As a rep for NWC, the school is always a high point in the year. It is also one of the busiest times for reps, working to encourage

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

DAVIDMANSELL/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



How will taking maternity leave affect my pension in the FPS?

Under the rules of the FPS paid maternity leave (whether statutory maternity pay or contractual pay) is treated as pensionable service, whereas unpaid additional maternity leave can only be treated as pensionable service where an election to pay contributions is made.

However, there is potential for the provisions in the FPS relating to unpaid additional maternity leave to be challenged. A recent decision of the European Court of Justice (“ECJ”) in *Land Brandenburg v SSAS* [2005] IRLR could provide the basis for a challenge on the grounds that the provisions in the FPS which impose conditions on unpaid maternity leave being treated as pensionable service amount to unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sex.

In the *Brandenburg* case the ECJ said that where the purpose of maternity leave is the protection of women as regards pregnancy and maternity, a period of statutory maternity leave will amount to maternity leave within the meaning of the Pregnant Worker’s Directive (the “Directive”).

The Directive which introduces measures to encourage improvements in safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding. This protection would seem to be particularly applicable to female firefighters, for whom early return to work would pose a significant health risk, including exposure to hazardous substances.

How is the retirement lump sum calculated under the FPS?

Examples of how the lump sum is calculated under the FPS can be found in the FPS Commentary on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s website i.e. at www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/45/RuleB7Commutationgeneralprovision_id1124045.pdf.

Examples show the pension before and after the tax free cash has been calculated.

Students to the 2006 FBU women’s school had a long list of questions about their pensions. Siren asked Julie Shuttleworth, a Thompsons Solicitor, to answer them

TERMS

Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (FPS)

New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (NFPS)

Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)

I am a member of the FPS. What happens if I take a career break ?

The FPS is closed to new entrants from 6 April 2006 and the intention is that those on career breaks would have to join the NFPS on returning to work. However, although this would apply where someone has to resign from the service it has been suggested that where a firefighter wishes to take a career break he or she could agree as part of the approval for the career break to be treated as a qualifying member of the FPS. This way it would be possible to remain in the FPS and be covered for pension benefits during the absence, although not accruing pension benefits over that period.

I am a member of the FPS. I do not have a spouse or a civil partner but I have children and would like the benefits payable to a spouse or civil partner to be paid instead to my children.

The FPS does not provide benefits on death for unmarried partners or dependants. However, the NFPS provides for a pension on death before or after retirement to be paid, not only to a spouse or civil partner, but also to a nominated partner or child. There is also the ability to nominate a recipient for the death grant.

In order to challenge the position in the FPS it would be necessary to establish that the current provisions are discriminatory in some way or in some way infringe members’ rights.



What happens in the NFPS if I go on maternity leave?

Your benefits continue and your contributions are based on the pay you actually receive when you are on paid maternity leave. When you are on unpaid maternity leave you have to pay contributions if the absence is to count as pensionable service. Contributions will be based on the rate of your pay immediately before the pay ceased.

Who can join the NFPS?

The NFPS will be open to all new firefighters joining the service from 6 April 2006. It will be open to all firefighters whether full, part-time or retained. Discussions are to take place about the possibility of making the NFPS available to control staff.

I am a retained firefighter. What is my position?

You will be eligible to join the NFPS. The position on the FPS if you had joined pre 6 April 2006 is unclear. The FBU won a case recently relating to a retained firefighter in the House of Lords (the Matthews case). In that case it was decided that retained firefighters are on the same contracts as whole-time firefighters. The case has been sent back to the Employment Tribunal to decide whether retained firefighters do the same work as whole-time firefighters. The House of Lords gave a heavy steer that they do. If successful in the Employment Tribunal it will mean that it will be necessary to determine how to credit any retrospective pension benefits for retained firefighters.

I am a member of the LGPS. What is the current position?

In April the Trade Unions met with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to discuss the future of the LGPS. They are working towards resolving the dispute regarding the removal of the Rule of 85 and protection for existing LGPS members.

Julie Shuttleworth is a pensions solicitor at Thompsons Solicitors. She joined Thompsons in July 2005 from Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP where she worked in the pensions group.

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A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE

At Annual Conference 2004 an emergency resolution on a woman's right to choose was moved at Conference by John Drake, Gloucestershire brigade committee, and was passed without any opposition debate. The Fire Brigades Union embraced the Abortion Rights campaign as instructed by FBU conference and the National Women's Committee actively pursued the campaign for a woman's right to choose. We did this through the Women's Trades Union Conference as reported by Emma Gibby (Region 8 Women's Rep) elsewhere in this edition of Siren, and through other events that have been reported previously. At Annual Conference 2005 Brian Moss from Staffordshire Brigade Committee moved a resolution on the Global Gag. This resolution was also passed by conference without any opposition debate. Both resolutions are available on the NWC website at: www.nwcfbu.co.uk

REX FEATURES



Abortion – a woman's choice

Across the world, there is a groundswell of opposition to reproductive rights. That's why a campaign for a woman's right to choose is so important, says Anne Quesney, director of the Abortion Rights Campaign

The introduction of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion are central to women's autonomy and equality. No means of contraception is 100 per cent effective and women will always need to control their fertility. If they cannot access safe abortion, women will inevitably resort to dangerous, clandestine procedures, putting their lives and health at risk. Before abortion was legalised in the UK in 1967, thousands of women lost their lives unnecessarily and many more suffered severe injuries. This is a trend that sadly continues across many of the world's poorest countries. Every year, 19 million abortions take place in unsafe conditions¹, harming millions of women and killing a staggering 70,000².

It is widely accepted that safe abortion saves women's lives. Yet, across the world, there is a groundswell of opposition to reproductive rights.

US President George Bush and the evangelical right are leading the anti-choice crusade, which is threatening to roll back women's fundamental right to control their body. Since his election in 2000, Bush has had women's access to abortion in his sights. He re-introduced the 'Global Gag' rule, a policy which withholds US funding from family planning clinics that provide abortion services or information in the world's poorest countries. Its impact is devastating.

In the US, during his presidency, hundreds of laws have been passed at state level to restrict women's legal rights. Abortion is now only available in 13 per cent of US counties, some states only have one abortion clinic left, others, such as South Dakota, are heading for a complete ban. With John Roberts and Samuel Alito, two of Bush's anti-choice allies, now firmly in the Supreme Court, moves have begun to restrict US federal laws for the first time since the groundbreaking 1973 Roe v Wade case which first legalised abortion.

Exceptional

Unfortunately, these alarming anti-choice successes are no longer confined to the US. Over the last year, the anti-choice lobby, here in Britain, has adopted similar tactics. It is promoting a misleading focus on later abortion in order to confuse opinion and win support for the chipping away of women's legal rights. In reality, very few women need later abortion – less than 2 per cent of the total. Those who do, face exceptional and distressing circumstances and need the protection of the law. When a woman



US President George Bush and the evangelical right are leading the anti-choice crusade

is forced to make a later decision – for example because of violent abuse, failure to diagnose pregnancy or serious welfare issues with an existing child – this is a fundamental question of a woman's right to choose.

Almost 40 years since abortion was legalised in the UK and women continue to face unnecessary obstacles. They still need the agreement of two doctors and frequently face barriers to accessing the procedure, including long NHS delays and obstructive GPs. Furthermore, the Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland. Yet, in spite of these unacceptable restrictions, abortion rights continue to be under sustained attack.

Postcard
Abortion Rights, the national pro-choice campaign, is working to defend and extend women's reproductive rights. Last October, it launched a postcard lobbying campaign 'would you turn the clock back on her rights?' to protect the time limit. The trade union movement has always played an important role in campaigning for such rights, and the FBU in particular, takes a strong stance in defence of a woman's right to make her own choices. Now is the time for all those who support women's equality and health to send the postcard to their MP and get involved in the campaign to defend women's abortion rights.

→ For more information about the campaign, to join as an individual member, to affiliate your FBU branch or to order copies of the postcard, please visit www.abortionrights.org.uk.

A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE

Emma Gibby, Wales Women's Rep, attended the Women's TUC this year for the first time and it was 'brilliant', she says

It was my first time at the Women's TUC. I found it overwhelming. I was also comforted by the support from all sisters in other unions. The conference was a fantastic experience and I found myself as an FBU member getting involved in debates and voting on issues which are constantly causing injustice against women.

The agenda was packed full of a wide and diverse range of issues, and I was looking forward to hearing the debates and views of others who felt as strong about those issues as I did.

Conference chair Barbara White from the Musicians Union, one of the smallest

It was very successful and there was a huge amount of useful information from all unions. I hope to be able to attend again next year

unions, opened proceedings with a speech that covered issues which would be discussed and debated over the following two and a half days, including childcare, women and Work Commission, equal pay and pregnancy discrimination

The Government's point of view when Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP, Minister for Culture, Media and Sport and Minister for Women told delegates that she was proud of the progress of women over the last one hundred years. But she agreed that issues such as national minimum wage, childcare places, maternity leave and violence against women were still a long way from being solved.

The FBU, for its part, put forward a motion on childcare, proposed by Staci Leach, Womens Rep Region 6, and an emergency resolution on abortion rights, to which Dona Feltham, NWC Chair, spoke.

On childcare we were seconded by the Association of University Teachers (AUT), which gave us full support for our campaign. It shared our concerns that the lack of affordable childcare was one of the many barriers to women's active involvement within the workforce.

A resolution on International Womens Day put forward by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport workers was seconded by the FBU. Emma Carr (Womens Rep Region 9) took to the podium on the Union's behalf and pointed out in particular how by celebrating the day we raise awareness of the value of women's work.

Ruth Winters the FBU President, participating in one of the many fringe meetings that took place, talked on the subject of abortion rights along with Anne Quesney the Director of London-based Abortion Rights campaign. The meeting explained to delegates how the Abortion Rights supports a woman's right to choose.

Dona Feltham (NWC Chair) spoke on this issue to the main conference floor, proposing the FBU's Emergency Resolution. She argued that unless we continue to fight, women's rights for abortion could be seriously undermined. This resolution was supported (seconded?) by the AUT and carried.

Finally it was my turn. It was my first time at conference. I was being persuaded by a few others (who know who they are) to get up and talk. Apparently I would feel better! I made a short speech on bullying at work, asking a question under paragraph to the TUC's Women's Committee. I admit, I did feel better!

I personally found the Womens TUC 2006 a brilliant event. It was very successful and there was a huge amount of useful information from all unions. I hope to be able to attend again next year.



THE FBU MOTIONS

ABORTION RIGHTS

Conference notes with concern the election, in February 2006, of anti-choice judge Samuel Alito to the US Supreme Court as Justice for life. With his appointment, the Court's 5-4 pro-choice majority has come to an end for the first time since the groundbreaking 1973 Roe vs Wade case legalised abortion in the US. The Supreme Court is now expected to sanction serious attacks on abortion rights across the US.

Already, individual states have passed over 400 laws limiting access, and abortion is now only available in 13% of US counties. Last month, South Dakota passed a bill to ban all abortion in an attempt to force the newly balanced Supreme Court to reconsider its key ruling on Roe v Wade.

Conference notes that Bush's aggressive anti-choice, anti-contraception agenda continues to have a devastating impact on reproductive rights worldwide, including in the UK, where the anti-choice lobby has adopted the successful tactics of its US counterparts – promoting a misleading focus on later abortion to win support for the chipping away of legal rights.

Conference opposes moves, including Laurence Robertson MP's Private Members Bill, to ban all abortion and condemns the increased use of aggressive and intimidatory anti-choice lobbying in Britain.

Conference calls on the TUC to work with



Abortion Rights and other pro-choice organisations to:

- i) defend the current legal upper time limit for abortion at 24 weeks;
- ii) ensure that workers in sexual health and abortion services, many of whom are trade union members, are free to carry out their work without fear of abuse or attack; and
- iii) make earlier access to abortion easier for women.

CHILDCARE

Conference has repeatedly acknowledged that the lack of affordable childcare is one of the many barriers to women's active involvement within the workforce and therefore the trade union movement. With this in mind and in support of women members seeking trade union activity and education: Conference demands that the General Council in conjunction with the TUC Women's Committee, ensures that the fundamental provision of good quality childcare forms an integral and consistent part of the planning and organisation of every conference, school, course or seminar being run by the TUC. This would not only facilitate women's access and involvement in all TUC events but would also alleviate many problems facing affiliates when encouraging women members and officials to undertake active participation in events all year round.



The FBU delegation to Women's TUC 2006, Eastbourne, 8-10 March

THE FBU DELEGATES AND SPEECHES

- Ruth Winters (FBU President): abortion rights
- Dona Feltham (NWC Chair): feminism of migrant workers and abortion rights
- Vicky Knight (EC Member for Women): women and the Local Government Pension Scheme
- Kerry Baigent (NWC Secretary): pregnancy discrimination
- Patsy Griffith (G & L Rep Region 6): supporting parents and carers
- Staci Leach (Region 6): childcare
- Emma Carr (Region 9): International Women's Day
- Emma Gibby (Region 8): bullying paragraph

She is not exactly of athletic build. She only ever ran in the past to keep fit for her job as a London firefighter. Now she is the proud owner of two hard earned Marathon medals. Sian Griffiths tells all to Siren

“I never ever really craved to run a marathon because I always thought it would be blooming hard work. And do you know what? I was right!

And how do I know? Because at 45 and a half and not exactly of athletic build, I now am the proud owner of two hard earned Marathon medals, having run (loose term) two marathons in two years.

I blame this madness on my two friends, Marg and Susan. For it was they who have always wanted to run a marathon but always thought they couldn't even run around the park. So, in their wisdom, they approached me, their super fit ruffy tufty firefighter pal to find out how to run, poor misguided fools. I didn't pretend to be an expert on running but I did know a bit about fitness. Little known fact, I was a YMCA qualified Aerobics/Step/Circuits Instructor and even taught for about two years. So as far as my mates were concerned I was the Green Goddess (GMTV fame not the clapped out controversial scab vehicles) and was good enough for their needs. So, not one to turn down a challenge, I agreed to go running with them. I imagined it to be a short lived whim. How wrong I was six years and two very, very long runs later.

Keep fit

In the past, I have only ever run because of the necessity to keep fit for my job but never really wanted to. Running is hard enough when you're stick thin but being built more like Les Dawson than Paula Radcliffe, I mostly ran/plodded only now and then, when I thought I'd better had and usually on my own.

So what I discovered after being convinced by my friends that I was their



SIAN GRIFFITHS

London Women's Action Committee, Chair
Watch Manager B (Nee Station Officer), Willesden Fire Station, London

An inspiration to

ideal fitness leader (for some reason they still know no better), was that learning to run with friends was challenging but great fun and much better than doing it alone.

Now I know some of you will be wondering what on earth am I on about, learning to run? "Just how difficult could it be?" I hear you say. Well of course it's not difficult; you just get out there and do it. But what I realised was that if you are interested and want to get the most out of your running, no matter your experience or level then there is actually quite a lot to learn. Especially important if you want to run for what seems like an eternity without injuring yourself irreparably. Really selling it here, eh?

In the beginning we would go for short runs (30 mins or less) and then we entered short races like the Flora Fun Run (5km

and slowly but surely the runs became longer as did the races we committed to – the longest was 16 miles – until we were left with no choice, it seems. "We might as well enter a marathon," said my dear friend Marg. We are still friends.

As I alluded earlier, I am not exactly athletically built, quite the opposite but what I now know is, is that this does not matter. What matters is the determination and commitment to see the mad damn fool idea through to the bitter end.

So the end result of all this 'fun' running was me taking four hours 49 mins to fonctionnent (run) through Paris in April 2005, dreaming of the champagne and oysters I had planned for my celebration meal after. Then this year taking even longer in London – four hours 57 mins. But then I did, of course, have to kiss and hug everyone



Sian and her friend Marg about 14 miles into the Paris marathon, April 2005



MANIPUL.COM THE MARATHON PHOTO COMPANY

The London marathon: Sian at 20 miles

and takes a lot of commitment and training. But it is possible and it is great to be able to say "I have run a marathon." Also, finding out that I beat a certain male London firefighter (you know who you are) who is about 15 years younger than me and known for saying "that women shouldn't be in the job" is nothing but sublime. I know, I know it's all about the taking part. Whatever!

So what next? I have a friend, Brenda Berkman, a New York firefighter, who has said don't give up until you have done NY. So it looks like that's where I will be in November 2007. Maybe I will run London again too if I can get another entry. Who knows? I also have details of the Berlin Inline Skate marathon in September but need to learn to skate first. Hey, how difficult could it be?

Maybe my tale will inspire others to do something a bit different (crazy?) and challenge themselves to do something they thought they never could or would whether it be running a marathon, getting involved in the FBU Women's Committee or challenging that insecure, sad individual that likes to make peoples lives a misery at work, commonly known as a bully.

If a marathon is your choice and you like to shop then please join me and the rest of the nutters in New York in November 2007. You have over 18 months to train so no excuses. Recipe to get going, a decent pair of trainers from a proper running shop, a decent bra for those well endowed ladies and a subscription to Runners World.

Raise funds

On a final, more serious note, running a Marathon is a great way to raise funds for your chosen charity/cause. I have found friends, family and colleagues to always be very generous and last year I raised over £3,200 for causes close to my heart. This year people were equally magnanimous and I received donations of over £1,600, £300 of which was due to the big-heartedness of all those at the FBU Women's School at Wortley Hall this April. I really can't thank you all enough for your kindness. Bless you all.

Should you want to find out more about my mid-life crisis, I mean marathon-running, or even if you want to join me please email me at work sian.griffiths@london-fire.gov.uk or at home on timandsian@tiscali.co.uk. All monies raised are to be divided between the Women At Risk charity and Donnington Primary school. You can still donate, should you wish to, until the end of June at www.justgiving.com/sianee

Thanks for reading. Peace, love and harmony and NO CUTS!"

SIREN QUIZ

1. What percentage of the world's land is owned by women?
2. How many of the world's leaders are women?
3. Who chaired the 2006 TUC Women's conference? From which union?
4. What does ACTSA stand for?
5. Who is the US Secretary of State?
6. Name five members of the FBU National Women's committee.
7. Who, present at this school has written a book about Sylvia Pankhurst?
8. Which countries have closed the gender pay gap?
9. In which year did the Equal Pay Act become law?
10. For what reason do 30,000 women lose their jobs every year?
11. Name five top ten hits with the word 'woman' in the title.
12. How many women MPs are there?
13. What percentage of the world's population age 80+ are women?
14. Name three Presidents past or present of the FBU?
15. What is the title of the FBU equality publication?
16. 1,440 of these die every day, what are they?
17. Who is the woman world record breaker who circumnavigated the globe single handedly in a boat?
18. For which two events did Kelly Holmes win gold medals?
19. Amy Rayner and Wendy Tomms are the only two women in the Premiership doing what job?
20. Devil Gate Drive, Can the Can and If You Can't Give Me Love were all hits for which female pop star?

Bonus question

Who was the first female UK Prime Minister? From what years was she in power?

ANSWERS on the FBU women's committee website at www.nwcfbu.co.uk

us all

that I managed to spot that came to cheer us on, Linda Smith being the first (I didn't cry, it was raining!). Paris was wonderful but the crowds in London were second to none and seeing my family (Tim and Cyd) at mile 20 was fantastic and made me even more determined to finish.

Ultimate thrill

But of course the ultimate thrill is crossing the finish line. I always thought it would be a good feeling but it really is something else after months and months of preparation. In Paris my friend Marg and I crossed the line together. It was amazing. I really felt that I had achieved a real goal. Something to keep in mind when you have to descend stairs backwards the following day!

So for those of you thinking of doing a marathon I can't deny that it is hard work

